

6
Several Discourses

U P O N

The Attributes of GOD,

Viz.

693.2.14.
Concerning the Perfection of God.
Concerning our Imitation of the Divine Perfections.
The Happiness of God.
The Unchangeableness of God.
The Knowledge of God.
The Wisdom, Glory, and Sovereignty of God.
The Wisdom of God, in the Creation of the World,
The Wisdom of God, in his Providence.
The Wisdom of God, in the Redemption of Mankind.
The Justice of God, in the distribution of Rewards
and Punishments.
The Truth of God.
The Holiness of God.

To which is annexed a Spital Sermon, Of doing Good.

By the Most Reverend

Dr. JOHN TILLOTSON,

Late Lord Arch-Bishop of Canterbury.

Being The SIXTH VOLUME;

Published from the Originals,

By Ralph Barker, D. D. Chaplain to his Grace.

L O N D O N,

Printed for R. Chiswell, at the Rose and
Crown in St. Paul's Churchyard, 1699.



The most Reverend
D^r. IOHN TILLOTSON
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*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father
which is in Heaven is perfect.*

THESE words are the Conclusion which our Saviour draws from those Precepts which he had given his Disciples of *greater perfection*, than any Laws that were extant in the world before. *V. 44.* *I say unto you, love your Enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for those that despitefully use you and persecute you.* And to perswade them hereto, he propounds to them the Pattern of the *Divine Perfection*; telling them, that being thus affected towards their Enemies, they should resemble God, *v. 45.*

B

That

The Notion of divine

That ye may be the Children of your heavenly Father; for he maketh the Sun to rise on the evil, and on the good, and sendeth Rain on the just, and on the unjust.


And then he tells us, that if we be not thus affected towards our Enemies, and those that have been injurious to us, we are so far from being like God, that we are but just level with the worst of Men, v. 46, 47. *For if ye love them which love you, what reward have you? do not even the Publicans the same? And if ye salute your Brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Publicans so?* And then concludes, that if we would attain that *perfection* which the Christian Religion designs to advance Men to, we must endeavour to be like God in these *perfections* of Goodness, and Mercy, and Patience; *Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.* In which words we have,

First, The absolute Perfection of the Divine Nature supposed; as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect.

Secondly, It is propounded as a Pattern to our imitation. Be ye therefore perfect, &c.

In handling of these words, I shall do these *four* things.

I. Consider how we are to conceive of the *Divine Perfection*.

II. I shall lay down some Rules  Vol. VI whereby we may govern and rectifie our Opinions concerning the Attributes and *Perfections* of God.

III. How far we are to imitate the *Perfections* of God, and particularly what those Divine Qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. I shall endeavour to clear the true meaning of this Precept, and to shew that the Duty here intended by our Saviour is not impossible to us; and then conclude this Discourse with some useful Inferences from the whole.

I. I shall consider how we are to conceive of the *Divine Perfections*. These two ways.

1. By ascribing all imaginable and possible *Perfection* to God.

2. By separating and removing all manner of *Imperfection* from him.

1. By ascribing all imaginable, and possible *Perfection* to God; absolute and universal *Perfection*, not limited to a certain kind, or to certain particulars; but whatever we can conceive, and imagine to be a *Perfection*, is to be ascribed to him;

yea and beyond this, whatever possible *Perfection* there is, or possible degree of *any Perfection*, which our short Understandings cannot conceive or comprehend, is to be ascribed to him. For we are not to confine the *Perfection* of God to our imagination, as if we could find out the *Almighty to Perfection*: But on the contrary, to believe the *Perfection* of the Divine Nature to be boundless and unlimited, and infinitely to exceed our highest thoughts and apprehensions.

More particularly, all kinds and all degrees of *Perfection* are to be ascribed to God, which either do not imply a plain Contradiction, or do not argue some *Imperfection*, or are not evidently inconsistent with some other and greater *Perfection*.

Some things may seem to be *Perfections*, which in truth are not; because they are plainly impossible, and involve a Contradiction; as that what has once been, should by any Power be made not to have been; or that a thing, which by its Nature is limited and confin'd to one place, should at the same time be in another. These things in Reason are impossible, and therefore not to be supposed to fall under any Power how unlimited

mitted soever. For if we once ascribe Contradictions to God, we destroy his Being; because then to be, and not to be, Power, and no Power would be all one.

And then there are some *Perfections*, which do argue and suppose Imperfections in them; as Motion, the quickness and swiftness thereof in Creatures is a *Perfection*, but then it supposeth a finite and limited Nature: For a boundless and immense Being, that is every where present at once, hath no need to move from one place to another; and therefore though Motion be a *Perfection* in Creatures, there is no Reason to ascribe it to God, because it supposeth a greater *Imperfection*.

And there are also some imaginable degrees of *Perfection*, which because they are inconsistent with other *Perfections*, are not to be admitted in the Divine Nature. For instance, such degrees of Goodness and Mercy may be imagined, as would quite exclude and shut out Justice; and on the other hand such a strictness and a rigour of Justice, as would leave no room at all for Patience and Mercy; and therefore such degrees are not really to be esteemed *Perfections*. For this is a certain truth, that nothing is a Divine *Perfection*,

which evidently clafheth with any other neceffary and effential *Perfection* of the Divine Nature. We muft fo confider the *Perfections* of God, that they may accord and confift together; and therefore it cannot be a *Perfection* of God to be fo good and gracious, as to encourage Sin, and to overthrow the Reverence of his own Laws and Government. 'Tis not Goodnefs, but Eafinefs and Weaknefs, to be contented to be perpetually injur'd and affronted. 'Tis not Patience, to be willing to be everlaftingly trampled upon. So likewise on the other hand, 'tis not a *Perfection* to be fo fevere and rigorous, as to fmite a Sinner in the instant that he offends, not to be able to refrain from Punifhment, and to give time for Repentance.

But whatever *Perfection* is conceivable or poffible, and argues no *Imperfection*, nor is repugnant to any other neceffary *Perfection*, is to be afcribed to God; for this is the moft natural and eafie conception that we can have of God, that he is the moft perfect Being. This natural Light doth firft fuggelt and offer to the Minds of Men, and we cannot conceive of God as meer Power and Will without Wifdom and Goodnefs. Hence it is that the

Greeks

Greeks call God very often, τὸ Κρεῖττον, the best of Beings, and the Latin *Optimus, Maximus, the best and the Greatest, beatissima & perfectissima natura, constans & perfecta Ratio, the happiest and most perfect Nature, immutable and absolute Reason*; and many other such expressions which we meet with in the Writings of the Heathen Philosophers. I readily grant, that the first and most obvious thought which men have of God, is that of his Greatness and Majesty; but this necessarily involves or infers his Goodness; as *Seneca* excellently reasons, *Primus Deorum cultus est Deos credere, dein reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla Majestas*, „The first Worship „of the Gods is to believe their Being; „next to ascribe to them Greatness and „Majesty, to ascribe to them Goodness, „without which there can be no Majesty.

And we shall find all along in *Plato*, & *Tully*, and the best and wisest Writers among the Heathen, that they every where attribute the highest Excellencies and *Perfections* to the Divine Nature, and do steer and govern all their Discourses of God by this Principle, that *Perfection* is to be ascribed to him: And

whenever any thing is said of God, they examin whether it be a *Perfection* or not; if it be, they give it him as his due; if it be not, they lay it aside, as a thing not fit to be spoken of him.

And in the Scripture we do every where find *Perfection* ascribed to the Nature, and Works, and Laws of God, to every thing that belongs to him, or proceeds from him: *Job 37. 16. Dost thou know the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge? And again, Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection? Ps. 18. 30 As for God his way is perfect Ps. 19. 7. The Law of the Lord is perfect.*

I shall not need to consider particularly the several *Perfections* of the Divine Nature, I shall only give you a brief Scheme and Draught of them. Whatever *Perfection* can be imagined either in the manner of Being or Acting is to be ascribed to God; therefore as to his Nature we say that he is a Spirit, that is, that he is not meer Body or Matter, because that would exclude several other *Perfections*; for meer Matter is incapable both of Knowledge and Liberty, being determined by necessary Laws of Motion; and yet without Knowledge and Liberty,

Liberty, there can be no Wisdom nor Goodness. We say of God, that he is of himself, and without Cause, and does not owe his Being to any other; and consequently that he is necessarily, and that he cannot but *be*, and cannot be otherwise than he is; for that which is of its self did not chuse whether it would be or not, nor whether it would be thus or otherwise; for to suppose any thing to deliberate or consult about it's own Being, is to suppose it to be before it is.

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We must say of God likewise that he is immense, and every where present, because to be limited is an *Imperfection*; and that he is eternal, that is, ever was, and shall be; for to cease to be, is a greater *Imperfection* than sometime not to have been.


And then we are to say of God, that he is the Cause of all other Beings, that they are made by him and depend upon him; that he knows all things, and can do all things in the most perfect manner, by a glance of his Mind, and by the meer beck and nod of his Will, without long study or deliberation, without laborious pains and endeavours, and consequently that nothing is exempted from his Knowledge, and Power,

Vol. VI. Power, and Providence, and that he administers all things in a way of Goodness and Wisdom, of Justice and Truth; and therefore all things are to be referred to him, as their last end. All these *Perfections*, and all other that are possible, we are to look upon the Divine Nature as fully and immutably possessed of, and that in an higher and more excellent degree, than our finite Understandings are able to conceive or comprehend.

2. As we are to ascribe all imaginable, possible *Perfections* to God, so we are to separate and remove all manner of *Imperfection* from him. We must not obscure or blemish the Divine Nature with the least shadow or blot of *Imperfection*. If we once admit of this, to ascribe any thing to God which argues *Imperfection*, we strike at the foundation, and destroy one of the clearest and most essential Notions, which Men have of God. And therefore we find the Scripture very careful to remove all kind of natural or moral *Imperfection* from God. *Gen. 18. 25. That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked,*
that

remov'd from God.

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that be far from thee ; shall not the Judge
of all the world do right ? Deut. 32. 4.
A God of truth and without iniquity. Rom.
9. 14- What shall we say then, is there
unrighteousness with God ? God forbid, far
be it from him.

Hence it is that in Scripture Holiness
is so frequently ascrib'd to God, which
signifies the purity and freedom of the
Divine Nature from that which we
call Sin ; and God is very solicitous to
give us such a notion of himself, as may
remove Sin and unrighteousness at the
greatest distance from him, because that
is the greatest of *Imperfections*. Is it an
Imperfection to countenance Sin ? the
Scripture acquits God of it. Psal. 5. 4,
5. *Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in
wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Thee.*
Is it an *Imperfection* to go from ones word,
or to change ones mind ? this likewise
is remov'd from God. 1 Sam. 15.
29. *The strength of Israel will not lie
or repent, he is not a man, that he should
repent.* Is it an *Imperfection* to want any
thing, to be liable to any thing, to
depend upon any thing without one's
self for their happiness ? this also is
to be set far from him. Job 22. 2, 3. *Can
a man be profitable to God ? or is it a gain
to*


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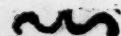
to him, that thou makest thy way perfect? Job 35. 6, 7. If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou art righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art, and thy righteousness may profit the Son of man. Is it an Imperfection to tempt, or to be tempted to Sin? this is to be separated from God, *He cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man*, saith St. James. Chap. 1. 17. And to mention no more, is it an Imperfection to be in any respect mutable? This is denyed of God, *with him there is no variableness, or shadow of turning*. Thus you see how we are to conceive of the Perfections of God, by ascribing all imaginable and possible Perfection to him, and removing all shadow of Imperfection from him. I proceed in the

II. Place, to lay down some Rules by which we may rectifie and govern our Opinions concerning the Attributes and Perfections of God: The best I can think of, are these following.


First, Let us begin with the most natural, and plain, and easie Perfections of God, and lay them for a foundation,
and

and rectifie all our other Apprehensions of God, and Reasonings about him, by these; and these are his Power, Wisdom, and Goodness, to which most of the rest may be reduced. Right Apprehensions and a firm Belief of these will make it easily credible to us, that all things were made and are governed, by him; for his Goodness will dispose and incline him to communicate Being to other things, and to take care of them when they are made. An infinite Power and Wisdom render him able to do all this without any labour or difficulty, and without any disturbance of his ease or happiness, as *Epicurus* would seem vainly to fear; who in truth did not believe a God, but pretended only to deny his Providence, and that he either made or govern'd the world; because he was loth to lay so much trouble upon him. Vain man! as if those things which are impossible and difficult to our Weakness and Folly, might not be infinitely easie to infinite Power and Wisdom.

Particularly the Goodness and Justice of God are not so difficult to apprehend, as the Disputes and Controversies about them have rendred them


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to many. When we consider infinite Knowledge and Power, we may easily lose our selves, and go out of our depth, by wading too far into them : There is something concerning these, that is unimaginable, and unaccountable to our Reason ; we may not be able to understand how Something may be produc'd from Nothing ; because it argues such an excess of Power, as we cannot comprehend ; but yet we are forc'd to acknowledge, that either the World must be produc'd from Nothing, or that Matter was eternally of it self, which is every whit as hard to imagine, as that infinite Power should be able to produce it from nothing. So likewise we are not able to conceive, how God can certainly know future Events, which depend upon voluntary and uncertain Causes, because we cannot comprehend infinite Knowledge ; but this we may easily be satisfied in, that infinite Power and Knowledge may be able to do, and know many things, which we cannot conceive how they can be known or done, no more than a Child can imagine how a great Mathematician can demonstrate his Propositions. Only this we are sure of,

of, as we can be of any thing, that no Power can do that which is evidently impossible, and implies a plain Contradiction.  Vol. VI.

We are not able perhaps to reconcile the particular Providences of God with his universal Goodness, Justice, and Wisdom, because we cannot see to the end of his Ways and Works at one view, and see every part with relation to the whole; which would appear very wise, if we knew the whole series of things, and saw the entire design together, as God himself does, to whom (as Solomon tells us) *all his ways are known from the beginning.*

So that however we may be at a loss in our Conceptions of God's infinite Knowledge and Power, yet Goodness, and Justice, and Truth, are Notions easie and familiar; and if we could not understand these, the whole Bible would be insignificant to us. For all Revelation from God supposeth us to know what is meant by Goodness, Justice, and Truth: And therefore no man can entertain any Notion of God, which plainly contradicts these. And it is foolish for any man to pretend, that he cannot know what Goodness, and Justice,

Vol. VI. Justice, and Truth in God are: for if we do not know this, 'tis all one to us, whether God be good or not, nor could we imitate his Goodness; for he that imitates, endeavours to make himself like something that he knows, and must of necessity have some Idea of that to which he aims to be like: So that if we had no certain and settled Notion of the Goodness, and Justice, and Truth of God, he would be altogether an unintelligible Being; and Religion, which consists in the imitation of him, would be utterly impossible.

Now these being the most easie, and intelligible *Perfections* of God, by which he is said in Scripture to declare his Name, that is, to make himself known to us, we should govern all our Reasonings about God (as concerning his Decrees, and his concurrence with the Free Actions of Men, and his particular Providence, which are things more dark and obscure) by what is more clear; and we shall find in Scripture, that in all these points holy Men do constantly appeal to these unquestionable and intelligible *Perfections* of God. *Wilt thou destroy the righteous with*

with the wicked? (saith Abraham) That be far from thee. Shall not the Judge of all the world do right? We may be mistaken; but God certainly knows who are wicked, and who are righteous; and he knows how to punish the wicked, and save the righteous: But we cannot be mistaken in this Principle, *that the Judge of all the world will do right.* Thus Moses satisfies himself, and others concerning the particular Providences of God towards the People of Israel. Deut. 32. 3, 4. *I will publish the name of the Lord: All his ways are judgement; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is He.* This we certainly know of God. So St. Paul, Rom. 2. 2. *Thou art inexcusable, O Man! Whatsoever Excuse men may pretend for their faults, he lays down this for a Principle, We are sure the Judgment of God is according to truth.*

Secondly, Let us always consider the Perfections of God in conjunction, and so as to reconcile them with one another. Do not consider God as meer Power and Sovereignty, as meer Mercy and Goodness, as meer Justice and Severity; but as all these together, and in such a measure and degree as may make them consistent

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sistent with one another. The greatest mistakes in Religion are certainly sprung from this root, from separating the *Perfections* of God, and considering them singly, and framing such wide and large notions of one, as to exclude another: whereas the *Perfections* of God agree together, and that is not a Divine *Perfection*, which contradicts any other *Perfection*. Among men indeed an eminent degree of any one Excellency does usually shut out some other; and therefore it is observ'd, that Power and Moderation, Love and Discretion, do not often meet together; that a great Memory and a small Judgment, a good Wit and an ill Nature, are many times found in conjunction: But in infinite *Perfection* all *Perfections* do eminently meet and consist together; and it is not necessary that one Excellency should be raised upon the ruines of another.

And if this had been well consider'd, Men would not, by being too intent upon God's Sovereignty, with neglect of his other *Perfections*, have spoken those hard things about Predestination: for the Sovereignty of God doth by no means set him above the Eternal Laws of Goodness, and Truth, and Righteousness;

ousness. And if this were considered, men would not, by poring upon the Justice and Severity of God, be so swallowed up in despair: for God is not so severe, but he is merciful to the penitent, and hath left a retreat for the returning Sinner. If this were well consider'd, it would check the presumption of those, who encourage themselves in sin, by fancying to themselves a God all of Mercy and Goodness; and *because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore their heart is fully set in them to do evil*: For it is not Goodness and Mercy finally to bear with and forgive obstinate Offenders; but want of Prudence and good Government.

Thirdly, Among different Opinions concerning God (as there always have been, and will be in the world) chuse those which are farthest from extremity; because Truth as well as Virtue usually lyes between the Extreame. And here I will instance in that Controversie, which has much disquieted the Church almost in all Ages, concerning the Decrees of God; about which there are two Extreame, the one that God peremptorily decrees the final

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condition of every particular person, that is, their everlasting happiness or misery, without any regard or consideration of the *good* or *bad* Actions of Men. The other, that God decrees nothing concerning any particular person, but only in general that men found under such and such Qualifications shall be happy or miserable, and puts it into their own power to qualify themselves. Now he that is doubtful in this matter, as every man must be that understands the difficulties on both sides, had best take up in the middle Opinion, that God decrees the final condition of particular persons with respect to certain Qualifications, which speaking absolutely are not in every Man's power ; but yet, under the influence of God's grace, which is never wanting to the sincere endeavours of men, may be said to be in our power, in the same sense, as St. Paul says, *I am able to do all things through Christ strengthening me* : For besides that this in all probability is the Truth, there will be this advantage in it, that he that stands in the middle, is like to be more moderate towards the Dissenters on both sides, than either of them

them will be to one another ; because the middle is not so far from either Extream, as the Extreams are from one another. At the worst, he stands fairest for an impartial enquiry after Truth, and when he has satisfied himself where the Truth lyes, he may more silently pass over to it, without any great imputation of inconstancy ; which cannot but be remarkable in him, who passeth from one Extream to another.

Fourthly, and lastly, Entertain no Opinion concerning God, that doth evidently contradict the Practice of Religion, and a good Life, though never so specious and subtile Arguments may be used to perswade it. Truth is most easily seen, and discern'd in those Reasonings and Opinions which tend to practice ; because the absurdity and inconvenience of them is soonest discovered ; whereas we cannot so certainly find out the truth or falshood of those Opinions, which speculative Men devise in their Studies, without any consideration whether they serve any real purpose of Life, or not. Men indeed are very apt to form those notions, which are most remote from common


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sense and use ; because more pains and wit are required to make them plausible : but there needs no other Argument to make a wise man despise them, than that they are unprofitable, and signifie nothing to our practice, and to make men truly better.

This is universally true in all kind of knowledge, but most considerable in the knowledge of God and Religion ; because that knowledge is of the greatest consideration. We need not scruple to admit some things, not so evident to Natural Reason, if we be satisfied of the truth of them, from an higher and more cogent Reason : As that God has revealed it, and said it ; this general Reason may perswade us of a thing that is above and beyond Natural Reason : But we may not admit any thing for a Divine Revelation, which evidently contradicts and weakens the practice of an holy Life ; because this is the main end of all Divine Revelation ; and we know God, only in order to the service and imitation of him.

Let us then look upon all knowledge that contradicts practice, as vain and false, because it destroys its end.

There

There are many things that seem probable enough in Speculation, which yet we most pertinaciously deny, because they are not practicable; and there are many things, which seem doubtful in Speculation, and would admit of great dispute, which yet because they are found true in practice and experience, are to be taken for certain and unquestionable. The ἀργὸς λόγος, the idle Reasoning of the *Stoicks*, was a thing contemned by the wiser Philosophers, as a vain and useless subtilty. *Zeno* pretends to demonstrate there is no Motion; and what is the consequence of this Speculation, but that Men must stand still? But so long as a man finds he can walk, all the Sophistry in the world will not persuade him, that Motion is impossible. In like manner, they that would persuade us, that men can do nothing, nor contribute any more to their own Sanctification, than Stocks or Stones, and upon Scripture Metaphors misunderstood, (as *our being dead in trespasses and sins*, and *created to good works*) graft Notions which are impossible and absurd in practice, do not consider that the natural consequence of this is, that men must do

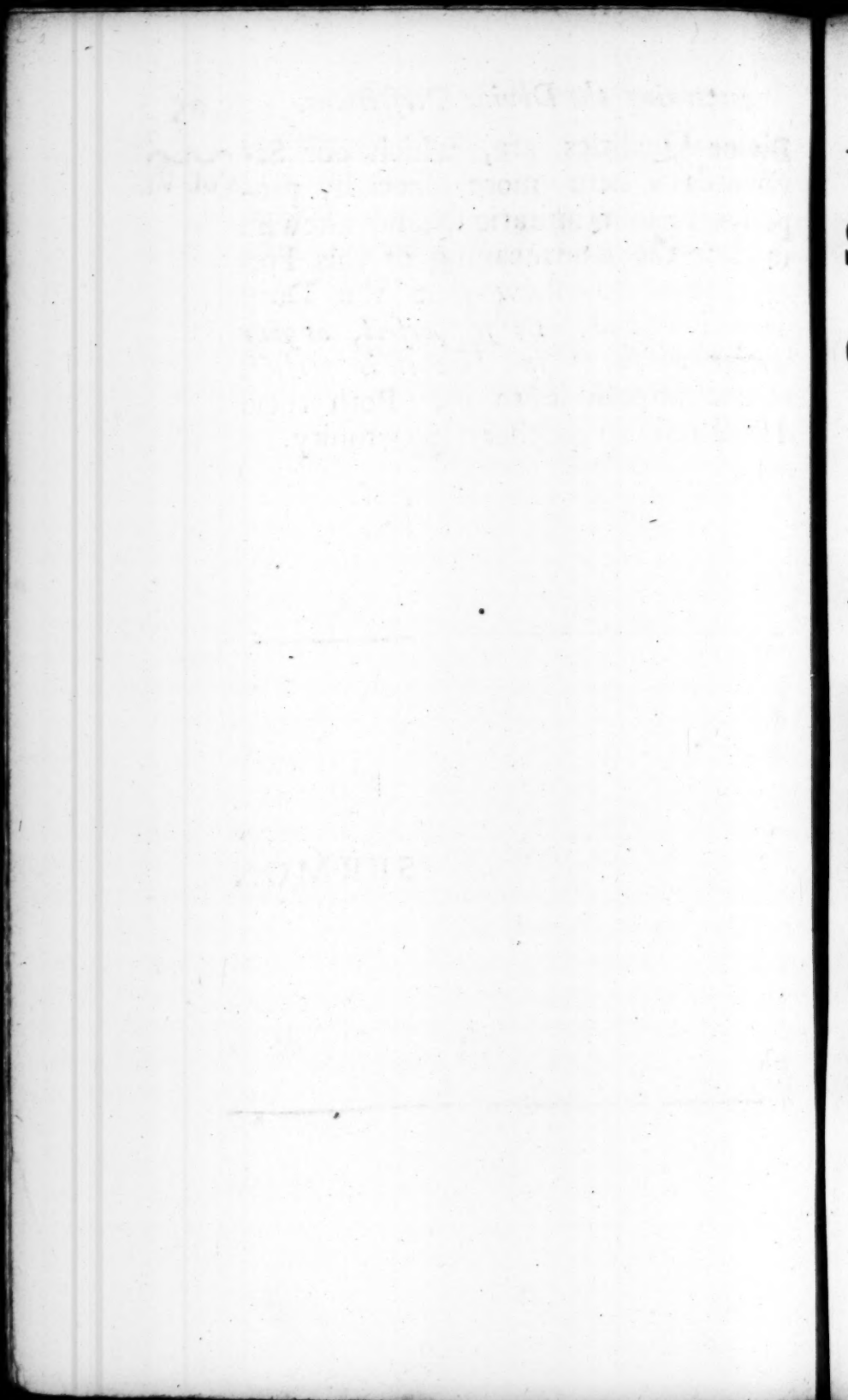


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nothing at all in Religion, never think of God, nor pray to him, nor read his Word, nor go to Church; but sit still, and be wholly passive to the operations of God's grace: but however this may seem plausible, and men may think they add much to the glory of God's grace, while they deny any power in the Creature; yet every considerate Man will presently apprehend, that this is by no means to be admitted, because it contradicts Practice, and makes all the Commands and Exhortations of God's Word vain, and to no purpose; because it destroys Religion, and discourages the endeavours of Men; makes them sloathful and careless of *working out their own Salvation*; than which nothing can set a man farther from God's grace and assistance, and more immediately dispose him for ruine; and upon some such false Reasoning as this, the *sloathful Servant* in the Parable *hid his talent in a napkin, and buried it in the earth*; but when he was called to account, his excuse was not admitted, but *he was cast into utter darkness*. The two other Particulars, namely how far we are to imitate the Divine Perfections, and particularly what those Divine

Divine Qualities are, which our Sa-
viour doth here more especially pro-
pound to our imitation, and likewise
to clear the true meaning of this Pre-
cept, and to shew that the Duty
here enjoined, *Be ye perfect, as your
Father which is in Heaven is perfect,*
is not impossible to us. Both these
I shall refer to another Opportunity.

SERMON



SERMON II.

Concerning our imitation of the
Divine Perfections.

MATTH. V. 48.

*Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father
which is in Heaven is perfect.*


IN these words we have, *First*, The absolute *Perfection* of the Divine Nature supposed, not only in those before mentioned, of Goodness, and Mercy, and Patience; but in all other Excellencies whatsoever.

Secondly, The *Perfection* of God is propounded as a Pattern for our Imitation.

In the handling of these two Particulars, I propounded to proceed in this method.

I. To shew how we are to conceive of the Divine *Perfection*.

II. To

 II. To lay down some Rules, by
 Vol. VI. which we may rectifie and govern our
 Opinions concerning the Attributes and
Perfections of God.

III. To shew how far we are to imitate the *Perfections* of God, and particularly what those Divine Qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. To clear the true meaning of this Precept, and to shew that the Duty here intended by our Saviour is not impossible to us ; and then to draw some useful Inferences from the whole.

The *two* first I have already spoken to, I now proceed to the *third* particular, which is to shew how far we are to imitate the *Perfections* of God, and particularly what those Divine Qualities are, which our Saviour doth here more especially propound to our imitation. For though these words do suppose the absolute *Perfection* of the Divine Nature, yet because there are several *Perfections* of God which are incommunicable, and a Creature, as such, is utterly incapable of them, these cannot be suppos'd to be intended for

a Pattern to us. As the necessity and independency of the Divine Nature; and the Self-sufficiency of it to his own happiness; to be the Original Cause of all things, and consequently supream Lord and Governour; the Immensity and Eternity of his Being; these, and perhaps several other *Perfections*, are incommunicable to a Creature; and it would be an unsufferable pride, and a kind of High Treason against the Divine Majesty, and a sottish Ignorance of the necessary bounds and limits of our own State, as we are Creatures, to think to resemble God in these Excellencies, of which the condition of a Creature is utterly incapable. This was the Sin of *Lucifer*, an ambition to step into the Throne of God, and *to be like the most high*.

So that in our imitation of the Divine *Perfection*, we are to keep within the station of Creatures, not affecting an Independency and Sovereignty like the most high, and to be Omnipotent as he is, *to have an arm like God, and to thunder with a voice like him*, as the expression is in *Job*: But to endeavour to resemble him, *pro modulo creaturae*, according to the rate and capacity


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ty of a Creature, in those Divine Qualities, and in such measures and degrees, as our finite and dependent Nature is capable of.

More especially and chiefly in the moral *Perfections* of the Divine Nature, such as are his Goodness, and Mercy, and Patience, his Justice, and Truth, and Faithfulness; these, and only these, the Scripture seems to comprehend under the name of Holiness; not all the Excellencies of the Divine Nature in general, but those which we call moral Excellencies and Perfections, such as those which I have named; for with these, and hardly with any other, is the Holiness of God joyn'd in Scripture, as *holy and righteous, holy and true*, &c. And therefore when God says, *be ye holy, for I am holy*, it signifies that we are to imitate God in his Goodness, and Mercy, and Patience, and Righteousness, and Faithfulness, and Truth; for these are the Holiness of the Divine Nature, which set him at the greatest distance from that which we call Moral Impurity and Sin.

For that which our Saviour here in the Text more peculiarly recommends
to

to our imitation, is the Goodness of God, of which his Mercy and Patience are two eminent Branches. The Mercy of God is his Goodness to those that are in Misery, or are liable to it. The Patience of God is his Mercy in sparing those who have deserved Punishment, and are liable to it. And the Goodness of God is then greatest, when it is exercised towards the evil and unthankful; those who are so far from deserving it, that they have given great and just Provocations to the contrary. And this affection and temper of Mind, which is so remarkable in God towards the unworthy and unthankful Sons of Men, our Saviour recommends to our imitation here in the Text. *Be ye therefore Perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is Perfect. Be ye therefore; this Particle of inference, therefore, hath a plain relation to something spoken before; and if we look back to v. 44. we shall find our Saviour there enjoyning his Disciples to love their Enemies, to bless them that curse them, to do good to them that hate them, and to pray for those that despightfully use them, and persecute them. And by what other argument doth he inforce the*

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the Practice of this difficult Duty, but by telling us, that this is to be like God, to be good to the evil and unthankful, *v. 45.* *That ye may be the Children of your Heavenly Father, who maketh his Sun to rise on the evil and the good, and his Rain to fall on the just, and on the unjust.* God is good to all, and exerciseth great Mercy and Patience even towards the evil, and unjust. And then he concludes, that if *Perfection* it self be fit to be a Pattern, we should labour after these Qualities, *Be ye therefore Perfect, even as your Father which is in Heaven is Perfect.* So that though the universal Perfection of the Divine Nature be here supposed, yet the Attributes of his Goodness, and Mercy, and Patience, are here particularly pointed at, and propounded to us for our Pattern; and the Precept of imitating the Divine *Perfection* is more especially to be understood of those *Perfections* which our Saviour had been discoursing of before, *viz.* the Goodness and Mercy of God. And that this is undoubtedly so, is evident from St. Luke's rendring this Precept, Ch. 6. 36. *Be ye therefore, imitators, benefici, ready to do good,*
full


full of kindness and benignity; merciful, as your Father which is in Heaven is merciful; that is, endeavour you to be such as I have described God to be. And this St. Matthew calls Perfection, because the Goodness of God is his great Perfection, and the Glory of the Divine Nature, that which reflects a lustre and beauty upon all his other Attributes, and takes off the terrour of them. From all which it is plain, what those Perfections of the Divine Nature are, which our Saviour doth here particularly recommend to our imitation. I come now in the

IV. and last place, To clear the true meaning of this Precept, and to shew that the Duty here required, and intended by our Saviour (when he says, *Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in Heaven is perfect*) is not impossible to us. And to this purpose be pleased to consider these three or four things.

1. That our imitation of God is certainly restrained to the communicable Perfections of God, and such as Creatures are capable of, as I have shewn before. For it is so far from being a Duty to affect or attempt to be like

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God

Vol. VI.  God in his peculiar Perfections, that it was probably the Sin of the Apostate Angels.

2. Our imitation of the Divine Perfections, which are communicable to Creatures, is likewise to be restrain'd to such degrees of these Perfections, as Creatures are capable of. For no Creature can ever be so perfectly Good, as God is; nor partake of any other Excellency in that transcendent degree, in which the Divine Nature is possest of it.

3. But there is no manner of inconvenience in having a Pattern propounded to us of so great Perfection, as is above our reach to attain to; and there may be great Advantages in it: The way to excel in any kind is, *optima quaeque exempla ad imitandum proponere*, to propose the highest and most perfect Examples to our imitation. No Man can write after too perfect and good a Copy, and though he can never reach the Perfection of it, yet he is like to learn more, than by one less perfect. He that aims at the Heavens, which yet he is sure to come short of, is like to shoot higher than he that aims at a mark within his reach.

Besides that the excellency of the Pattern,

Pattern, as it leaves room for continual improvement, so it kindles Ambition, and makes Men strain and contend to the utmost to do better: And though he can never hope to equal the Example before him, yet he will endeavour to come as near it as he can. So that a perfect Pattern is no hindrance, but an advantage rather to our improvement in any kind.

4. If any thing can be supposed to be our Duty, which is absolutely beyond our Power, a Precept of this nature, may with as much reason be supposed to be so, as any thing that can be instanc'd in: Because in such a case, if we do our best, and be continually pressing forward towards the Mark, though we can never reach it, yet we do very commendably; and whatever the law may require to try and raise our Obedience, yet in all equitable Interpretation, such a Will and Endeavour will be acceptable with God for the Deed. For if the Perfection of the Law do really exceed our Ability, and be beyond the possibility of our Performance, the assurance we have of God's Goodness will sufficiently secure us from any danger and prejudice up-

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on that account. And we may reasonably presume, that to do all we can towards the fulfilling of this Precept, will be as acceptable to God, and as beneficial to our selves, as if our Power had been greater, and we had perfectly fulfill'd it. If our Heavenly Father, to try the readiness and cheerfulness of our Obedience, bid us do that which he knows we cannot do, though we can do something towards it, we may be sure that he will be very well pleased when he sees, that in obedience to him we have done all that we could. And we may in this case reason as our Saviour does; *If we that are evil would deal thus with our Children, how much more shall our Heavenly Father?* The Goodness of God signifies very little, if it does not signify this, that in any instance of real and unquestionable Goodness, God is much better than any Father upon Earth.

However, at the worst, that wherein we fall short of the *Perfection* of the Law, may be supplied on our part, by an humble acknowledgment of our own Weakness and Imperfection, and on God's part by Mercy and Forgiveness,

ness, for the sake of the perfect Obedience of our blessed Redeemer. This is the least benefit we can expect in this case from the Grace, and Mercy, and Equity of the Gospel.

5. And *lastly*, which will fully clear this matter, this Precept doth not oblige us to come up to a perfect equality with the Pattern propounded to us, but only imports a vigorous imitation of it; that we be perpetually ascending and climbing up higher, still advancing from one degree of Goodness to another, and continually aspiring after a nearer resemblance to God: And this certainly is possible to us, to endeavour to be as like God as we can, in this weak and imperfect state.

Whereas any Equality with God, even in the communicable Attributes of his Goodness, and Mercy, and Patience, is not only impossible to us in this state of Sin and Imperfection, but above the condition of a Creature, even of *the Spirits of just Men made Perfect*, and of the highest Angels in Glory: for their Perfection is not absolute, but in comparison with our present state. And I think there is no great Reason to doubt, but that

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the blessed Spirits above, who continually behold the Face of their Father, are still writing after this Copy, which is here propounded to us ; and endeavouring *to be perfect, as their Father which is in Heaven is perfect* ; still aspiring after a nearer and more perfect resemblance of God, whose Goodness and Mercy is so far beyond, and before that of any Creature, that they may be for ever approaching nearer to it, and yet never overtake it.

And this seems to be no inconsiderable ingredient, and enhancement of the happiness of Heaven, that the Holiness of good men (which is the similitude of God) is never at a stand, nor at it's full growth and period ; but that the glorified Saints (yea and blessed Angels too) may be continually growing and improving, and they themselves still become better and happier to all eternity. And this in my apprehension is no undervaluing the happiness of Heaven, that it is not so perfect at first, as it shall be afterwards ; because it is granted on all hands, that the happiness of those good Souls, who are already in bliss, shall be more perfect

perfect and compleat at the Resurrection. And why may it not then be continually increasing, and be augmented still more and more, without any stint or final period of it's perfection? In this world we are apt to faint in a long course of goodness, and to be *weary of well doing*. But in the other state, when men shall be strongly by-
assed to goodness, and have nothing to pull them back, it will then be so far from being a trouble, that methinks it should be a mighty pleasure to the blessed, to find that there is no end of their doing good and becoming better. For if conformity to God be the ground and foundation of all Happiness, then our Blessedness will advance proportionably, as we grow more and more like to him. This I confess were a dismal Consideration, to think that in Heaven we should be liable to relapse, to go backward, or fall from that holy and happy state. But this is a comfortable Consideration, that our holiness and happiness shall never be at a stand, that it is secure so far as it goes, and that we cannot lose what we have once attain'd, as we may do in this world. This methinks

Vol. VI. should be a trouble to no man, that as good and happy as he is at first, he shall still be better and better, more and more happy without end.

But be that as it will, and as God pleaseth (for we do but talk in the dark about our future state,) this is certain, that an equality with God in any of his *Perfections* is not to be attained by any Creature, and therefore cannot be thought to be the meaning of this Precept: But that which our Saviour requires, is a vigorous imitation of this Pattern; that we have this Example of the Divine *Perfection* always before us, and that we be continually endeavouring, as much as in us lies, to bring our selves to the nearest resemblance of God, that possibly we can. And if this be our sincere care and study, we need not doubt but that it will find acceptance with God, and that he will be graciously pleased to esteem us for his Children; and if there need a pardon for it, that God will forgive wherein we fall short of the *Perfection* of that Pattern, which we can never imitate to Perfection.

And happy were it for us, if this were all the ground of our fear and trouble,

trouble, that when we had done all we could, we must still fall much short of the *perfection* of God's Law, and the Duty therein laid upon us ; alas ! which of us does near so much as we can, and is not conscious to himself that it is through his own fault and neglect, that he is so unlike his heavenly Father in Goodness and Mercy, in Righteousness and true Holiness ; and that he still partakes in so great a measure of those, not only unreasonable and brutish, but even devilish Passions of Malice and Hatred, of Rage and Cruelty, of Impatience and implacable Revenge ; and that these ungodlike Qualities do so frequently prevail upon us, and have so much dominion over us !

We are so far from being what we ought, in these and many other respects, that we are far from what we might be, if we would mind our Duty with care and conscience, and make it our sincere endeavour to subdue our selves to a conformity to God, and to a perfect holiness in his fear.

Would we but often set God before our eyes, and represent to our selves those excellent and amiable *Perfections* of the Divine Nature, which are so comfortable


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comfortable and beneficial to us, and to which we stand so infinitely oblig'd, his Goodness and Mercy and Patience, upon which all our hopes of Happiness do depend, and to which we are indebted, that we are not miserable past recovery ; that Goodness and Patience which he continually exerciseth towards us, (for we provoke him every day,) and exerciseth towards us on purpose to endear those *Perfections* to us, from which we reap so much comfort and advantage ; that by the Pattern of *Perfection* it self, and the Example of him who is so much above us, so no ways oblig'd to us, nor tyed by any interest to be concerned for us, and who being happy in himself neither hopes nor fears any thing from us ; I say by an Example that has all these advantages, we might be provok'd to be so affected towards one another (who have mutual Obligations one to another, and mutual Expectations of Good or Evil one from another) as we have always found God to be towards us, and as we desire he should still continue ; and miserable Creatures are we, when ever he ceaseth to be so : And we have reason to fear he
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will cease to be so, if this Example of his Goodness and Patience towards us, do not transform us into the Image of the *Divine Perfections*, and prevail upon us to imitate those Excellencies, which we have so much reason to approve and admire, and be in love withal.

These Considerations taken both from ingenuity and interest should awaken our sloath, and stir up our most resolute and vigorous endeavours after that *Perfection* which our Saviour here requires, and make us ashamed of our lazy complaints, that our Duty is set so high, that the endeavours of our whole life cannot reach it; when yet we have hardly made one step towards it, and are so remiss and unconcern'd about it, as if we could do it at any time with the greatest ease, and at an hours warning, before we leave the world, could fulfil this Precept of our Lord, of *being perfect as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect.*

And yet let me tell you, so far as any of us are from resembling our heavenly Father in some good degree and measure, so far are we distant from Heaven, and the temper of the blessed; so far are we utterly unqualified for the blissful

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blissful sight and enjoyment of God : for unless we be first *like him*, we cannot see him as he is : Only the pure in heart shall see God, and therefore every man that has this hope in him, should purifie himself even as he is pure.

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, dispatcht the *four* things I propounded for the Explication of this Text ; namely, how we are to conceive of the Divine *Perfections*, and to give some Rules to regulate and govern our Opinions concerning the Attributes and *Perfections* of God ; to explain the extent of this Duty, and vindicate the possibility of it.


All that now remains, is to draw some useful Inferences from this Discourse which I have made ; and they shall be these *two*.

I. That the strongest and surest Reasonings in Religion, are grounded upon the Essential *Perfections* of God.

II. That the truest and most substantial Practice of Religion, consists in the *imitation* of God.

I. That the strongest and surest Reasonings in Religion are grounded upon the Essential *Perfections* of God ; so that even Divine Revelation it self doth

doth suppose these for its Foundation, and can signifie nothing to us, unless these be first known and believed. Unless we be first perswaded of the Providence of God, and his particular Care of Mankind, why should we believe that he would make any Revelation of himself to Men? Unless it be naturally known to us, that God is true, what foundation is there for the belief of his Word? And what signifie the Laws and Promises of God, unless natural Light do first assure us of his Sovereign Authority and Faithfulness? So that the Principles of Natural Religion, are the foundation of that which is Revealed; and therefore in Reason nothing can be admitted to be a Revelation from God, which plainly contradicts his Essential *Perfection*, and consequently if any pretends Divine Revelation for this Doctrine, That God hath from all Eternity absolutely decreed the eternal ruine of the greatest part of Mankind, without any respect to the Sins and Demerits of Men, I am as certain that this Doctrine cannot be of God, as I am sure that God is Good and Just: because this grates upon the Notion that Mankind have of Goodness

Vol. VI.  Goodness and Justice. This is that which no good man would do, and therefore cannot be believed of infinite Goodness; and therefore if *an Apostle or Angel from Heaven* teach any Doctrine which plainly overthrows the Goodness and Justice of God, *let him be accursed*. For every man hath greater assurance that God is Good and Just, than he can have of any subtile Speculations about Predestination and the Decrees of God.

And for the same Reason I cannot believe, upon the pretended Authority or Infallibility of any Man or Church in the world, that God would not have Men understand their Publick Prayers, and the Lessons of Scripture which are read to them. A Lesson not to be understood is nonsense: a Lesson is something to be learn'd, which how it can be without being understood, is hard to comprehend.

And as little can I believe upon the Authority of any Person or Church whatsoever, that God should reveal his Will to Men in the holy Scriptures, with a design to have it hid, and lock't up from the generality of Mankind in an unknown Tongue. And much
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less can I believe (which yet is the express Doctrine of the Council of Trent) that the saving Efficacy of the Sacrament depends upon the Intention of the Priest. Which is to say, that though people believe, and live never so well, they may be damned by Sholes and whole Parishes together at the pleasure of the Priest, and for no other reason, but because he is so wicked, as not to intend to save them. Can any man believe this that hath any tolerable notion of God's Goodness? May we not in this case appeal, as *Abraham* did, to the Goodness and Justice of God, and expostulate with greater Reason, than he did, much after the same manner, *wilt thou destroy the righteous for the wicked; That be far from Thee to do after this manner,* to damn the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous people should lye at the mercy of a wicked Priest, to be damned or saved at his pleasure, *that be far from Thee; Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?* And can there be a greater affront to the Goodness and Justice of God, than to imagin he should deal with men after this manner? If this be to do right, there is no possibility of doing wrong.

And

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And to give but one instance more, I can never believe, upon the Authority of any Man, or Church whatsoever, that our Saviour, in the Celebration of his last Supper, did with his own hands give away his own Natural Body into the hands of his Disciples, and give his Blood shed, before it was shed; That the whole Doctrine of Christianity should mainly rely upon the Evidence of Miracles, the assurance of which depends upon the certainty of Sense; and yet that an Essential part of that Doctrine should overthrow the certainty of Sense. I can never while I live believe these two things, that the last thing our Saviour did before his death should be to teach his Disciples not to believe their own Senses, as he must do if he taught them Transubstantiation; and that the very first thing he did after he was risen from the dead, should be to teach them the quite contrary, by appealing to the certainty of Sense for the proof of his Resurrection; for when they doubted of his Resurrection, Luke 24. 38. *He said unto them, why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself, handle me and see, for a Spirit hath not flesh and bones,*

bones, as ye see me have. If this be a good Argument, that it was a real Body which they saw, because they saw and felt Flesh and Bones: is it not as good an Argument on the other side, that what they saw in the Sacrament was not his real and natural Body, because they could neither see nor handle Flesh and Bones? So that I cannot believe Transubstantiation, unless I can believe that Truth it self can contradict and destroy it self.

You see of what use it is to have right and steady Apprehensions of the *Divine Perfections*, that, these being laid for a foundation, we may upon all occasions have recourse to them, and govern our Opinions and Reasonings in Religion, about all doubtful matters, by such Principles as are clear and unquestionable. The

II. Inference is, That the truest and most substantial Practice of Religion consists in the imitation of the *Divine Perfections*, especially the *Moral Perfections* of the Divine Nature, which the Scripture is wont to comprehend under the name of Holiness; and such are the Goodness, and Mercy, and Pa-

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tience of God, his Justice, and Truth, and Faithfulness. To imitate God in these is true Religion; or as St. James expresses it, *pure Religion, and undefiled, ἀμικτός*, without any flaw or blemish, alluding to precious Stones, the greatest commendation of which is to be clear and without flaw. *Religio est imitari quem colis, this is Religion to imitate him whom we worship.* This the Heathens by the light of Nature did discover to be the great End of Religion, and the best Worship of the Deity, to be like God. *Pythagoras* was wont to say, "that we honour God most, "when we are most like him in the "temper and disposition of our Minds; and *Plato* to the same purpose, "that the "height and *Perfection* of Goodness, is to "resemble God, as near as is possible; "and that we resemble God in being "just, and holy, and wise. So likewise *Hierocles*, "that a good man imitates "God in the measures of Love and "Friendship, who hates no man, and "extends his benignity to all Mankind. *Plutarch* hath an excellent Discourse about the Patience of God towards Sinners, and gives this as one Reason why God doth not presently punish Offenders

Offenders ; "that he might give an Example to us of Gentleness and Patience, "and check the fury and violence of men "in revenging Injuries upon one another; "which nothing will do more effectually, "than to consider that Gentleness and "Forbearance are an imitation of the "Divine Perfection. And then he cites an excellent saying of Plato, "that "God manifested himself, and display'd "his Perfections in the World for our imitation ; true Virtue being nothing "else, but an imitation of the Divine Nature. For there is no greater Benefit "man can receive from God's hand, than "to become virtuous by the imitation "and pursuit of those Excellencies and "Perfections which are in God. Seneca likewise hath many passages to this purpose, *inter viros bonos ac Deum amicitia est, imò etiam necessitudo & similitudo*, between God and good men there is a friendship, yea and an intimacy and likeness ; and that a virtuous man is *discipulus æmulatorque & vera progenies Dei*, a disciple and imitator, and the very genuine off-spring of God. So that the light of Nature, and the Reason of Mankind, have always placed the perfection of Religion in the imitation of the Divine Excellencies and Perfections.

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And this is very agreeable to the language and ſenſe of the holy Scriptures, which every where make the Practice of Religion to conſiſt in our Conformity to God, and the Laws which he hath given us; which are nothing elſe but a tranſcript of his Nature. The great buſineſs of Religion is to do the Will of God, and *this is the will of God, our ſanctification*; and our ſanctification is our conformity to the holineſs of God; and this is the ſcope of the general Exhortations of Scripture, to perſwade us to holineſs, that is, to an imitation of the Moral Perfections of the Divine Nature. 2 Cor. 7. 1. *Having therefore theſe promiſes, dearly beloved! let us cleanſe our ſelves from all filthineſs of fleſh and ſpirit, and perfect holineſs in the fear of God.* 1 Pet. 1. 15, 16. *As he which hath called you is holy, ſo be ye holy in all manner of converſation, becauſe it is written, be ye holy for I am holy.* 2 Pet. 1. 3, 4. ſpeaking of the Chriſtian Religion, which he calls the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby alſo (ſays he) are given unto us exceeding great and precious promiſes, that by theſe we might be partakers of a divine nature, having eſcaped the corruption that is in the world through

consists in the imitation of God.

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through lust. So that the holiness the Gospel designs to bring us to, is a *participation of the Divine Nature*, which we can no otherwise partake of, but by an imitation of the *Divine Perfections*. This is that which the Scripture expresses to us by the terms of *Regeneration*, the *New Man*, and the *New Creature*. And therefore those who are converted from a wicked and sinful state, and reclaimed to goodness, are said to *put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness, and the holiness of truth*. Ephes. 4. 23. *To be renewed after the image of him that created us*. Coloss. 3. 10. *This is to be the sons and children of God, to imitate and resemble God in our dispositions and manners*. Ephes. 5. 1. *Be ye therefore, μιμνται τῷ θεῷ, imitators of God, as dear children*. Philip. 2. 15. *That ye may be blameless and sincere, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation*. 1 John 3. 10. *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the Devil, whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God*. There have been great enquiries concerning the Marks of a Child of God; this is the true Character, and that which in effect comprehends all

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others, our imitation and reſemblance of God in thoſe *Perfections* wherein he is ſet forth for a Pattern to us. And in this mainly conſiſts the practice both of Natural Religion, and of true Chriſtianity.

But does not Religion conſiſt very much in the Duties of God's Worſhip, in the Exerciſes of Piety and Devotion, in conſtant and frequent Prayers to God, and in the celebration of his Goodneſs by Praise and Thankſgiving, in reading, and hearing, and meditating upon God's Word, in Faſting and Abſtinance, and keeping our bodies in ſubjection to our ſpirits, and in frequent receiving of the holy Sacrament? To this I anſwer, That Religion doth conſiſt very much in the due performance of theſe Duties, and they are unqueſtionable and neceſſary parts of Religion, and the Means appointed by God for the begetting and increaſing in us ſuch diſpoſitions of mind, as render us moſt like to God, and for the production of all the fruits of Goodneſs and Holineſs and Righteouſneſs in our lives.

But then it is to be conſidered, that theſe Exerciſes of Piety and Devotion are but the *Means* of Religion,

gion, and not the ultimate End and Design of it. All these do but serve to bring us to a nearer resemblance of God; and where they fail of this End, and are performed for their own sakes only, and we rest in them, without aiming at any thing farther, they lose their nature; because they are not used as *Means*, but rested in, as if they were the *End* of Religion. And it is to be feared there are many which fall into this fatal mistake about Religion, and think that if they do but serve God in their Families, and go to Church, and behave themselves there with Devotion and Reverence, and at certain seasons receive the Sacrament, they are truly religious, and very good Christians; when all this while they take no care to improve themselves in real Goodness, by an inward conformity of their Minds to God, and the real reformation and amendment of their Lives, by mortifying their Lusts, and subduing their Appetites and Passions to the Laws of Reason and Religion, by *putting on as the elect of God bowels of kindness*; by being true and faithful; righteous and just, patient and *merciful, as their Father*

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which is in heaven is ſo ; and by forbearing one another in caſe of provocation, and forgiving one another, even as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven us ; by purifying themſelves as God is pure, and endeavouring to be holy in all manner of converſation, as he who hath called them is holy ; when all this while they are as covetous, and earthly minded, and to ſerve their covetouſneſs will ſtrain a point of Truth or Juſtice, and hardly do an act of Charity in their whole lives, but what is extorted from them by meer importunity, or ſome ſuch urgent neceſſity, in point of decency and reputation, that for ſhame of the World they know not how to avoid it ; when their Paſſions are as fierce and ungoverned, their Hearts as full of Gall and Bitterneſs, their Tongues of ſlander and evil ſpeaking, their Humours as proud and ſurly and cenſorious, as theirs can be who are openly profane, and ſeem to neglect and deſpiſe all Religion: And yet becauſe they ſerve God (as they call it) and make an external appearance of Piety and Devotion, are good Church-men, and attend upon the Ordinances of God, they think they have diſcharged the whole buſineſs of Religion

Religion admirably well, and are very good *children of God*, and in a state of great grace and favour with him. Whereas the performance of all these Duties, and the use of all these Means, separated from that which is the great End of Religion, the Conformity of our selves to God, in those Qualities and Dispositions which I have mention'd, is so far from finding acceptance with God, that it is an abomination to him. So God every where declares in Scripture, telling us, that *the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord*, and that he disdains to be praised by men of unhallowed lips and lives; and that unless with *the praises we offer to him*, we order our conversation aright, we shall not see the salvation of God. With what contempt does he speak of this formal and external Religion, without the power of it upon our hearts and lives! *To what purpose is the multitude of your Sacrifices to me? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of Rams, and ten thousands of rivers of Oil? he hath shewed thee, O man! what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Is not this the fast which I have chosen, to break the bands of wickedness, and to let the oppressed*

Vol. VI. pressed go free, to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thine house; when thou seest the naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thy self from thine own flesh?

Nor is it hearing of the Word that will avail us, unless we be doers of it. Blessed are they (says our Saviour) that hear the word of God and keep it. He that heareth these sayings of mine, and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man, who hath built his house upon a rock. Nor will bare receiving of the Sacrament recommend us to God; but performing the Obligation, which thereby we take upon our selves, to obtain from all sin and wickedness; otherwise we tread under foot the Son of God, and prophane the blood of the Covenant, whereby we should be sanctified, as if it were an unholy thing. Can any man think that to be Religion, which has no effect upon the lives of men, which does not teach them to govern their words and actions, who reads those plain words of St. James? If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, that man's Religion is vain. Pure Religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widdows in their affliction,

fiction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. When Religion produceth these real Effects, then the *Means* of Religion do truly serve the *End* of it, and we are *not* only hearers of the Word, but doers of it, and shall be blessed in our deed.

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So that as there is an obligation upon us to use the *Means* of Religion, which God hath instituted, with great care and conscience; so we should chiefly mind that, which is the *End* of all Religion, which is to make us *partakers of a Divine Nature*, and make us like to God, especially in those amiable and excellent Qualities, which are the glory and beauty of the Divine Nature, his Benignity and Goodness, his Mercy and Patience. These, because they are the primary *Perfections* of God, are the principal Duties both of Natural and Revealed Religion, and of an eternal and indispensable Obligation; because they have their foundation in the Nature of God, which is fixt and unalterable. And all positive Institutions, when they come in competition with these, are to stoop and vail to them. *Natural* and *Moral* Duties, especially those of Goodness, and Mercy, and Charity,

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Charity, are ſo ſtrongly bound upon us, that nothing in any reveal'd Religion can cancel the Obligation of them, or juſtifie the violation of theſe great and indiſpenſable Laws. Our Saviour in his Religion has declar'd nothing to the prejudice of them: but on the contrary has ſtraitned our Obligation to them, as much as is poſſible. *The Son of man came not to deſtroy mens lives, but to ſave them*; ſo that they know not what manner of ſpirit they are of, who think to pleaſe God by hating men, who are made after the image of God, & by killing one another to do him good ſervice; who to advance his Cauſe and Religion in the World, will break through all the Obligations of Nature and Civil Society, undermine Government, and diſturb the Peace of Mankind.

Whereas our Saviour did not by any thing in his Religion deſign to alter the Civil Government of the World, or to leſſen and diminifh the Rights of Princes, or to ſet men looſe from Allegiance to them, or to make Treafon and Rebellion, bloody Wars and barbarous Maſſacres lawful, for the propagating of his faith. He had (as any one would imagin) as much Power as the Pope; but yet he depoſed

no Princes, nor excommunicated and discharged their Subjects from their Fidelity and Obedience to them, for their opposition to his Religion; he hath assumed no such Power to himself. *By what Authority then does his Vicar do these things? and who gave him this Authority?* Our Lord tells us plainly, *his Kingdom was not of this world*; and that without any distinction of *in ordine ad spiritualia*, and therefore he wrested no Princes Kingdom out of his hands, nor seized it as forfeited to himself.

But this Power the Pope claims to himself, and hath exercised it many a time, disturbing the Peace of Nations, and exercising the most barbarous Cruelties in the World, under a pretence of Zeal for God and Religion: as if because Religion is so very good a thing in it self, it would warrant men to do the very worst things for its sake; which is the ready way to render Religion contemptible and odious, and to make two of the best things in the World, God and Religion, good for nothing.

If we would preserve in the Minds of Men any reverence and esteem for Religion, we must take heed how we destroy the Principles of *Natural Religion*,
and

Vol. VI. and undermine the Peace and Happineſs of Humane Society, for the glory of God, and under pretence of following Divine Revelation, and being led by a Church that cannot err: for every Church doth certainly err, that teacheth any thing plainly contrary to the Principles and Dictates of Natural Religion, and utterly inconfiſtent with the eſſential Perfections of God, and with the Peace and Order of the World: for *God is not the God of Confuſion, but of Order*; which St. Paul appealeth to, as a Principle of eternal Truth, and naturally known: But they that pretend that Religion prompts men to Sedition and Cruelty, do repreſent God as *the God of confuſion, and not of order.*

Therefore whatever men may through an ignorant zeal, or for ambitious Ends, pretend to be Religion; let us place it in that which is unqueſtionable, the imitation of the Divine Perfections, and let us (as the Apoſtle exhorts) *put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindneſs, meekneſs, long-ſuffering, and above all, let us put on Charity, which is the very bond of perfection.* The great Perfection of the Divine Nature, or rather the very Eſſence of God is Love. So St. John ſpeaks, *God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God,*
and

and God in him. And 'tis very remarkable that in these very qualities of Charity, and Kindness, and Compassion, which we peculiarly call *Humanity*, we approach nearest to the *Divinity* it self, and that the contrary Dispositions do transform us into wild Beasts and Devils.

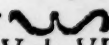
And yet as severely as I speak against these Principles and Practices, I have an hearty pity and compassion for those who are under the power of so great a Delusion, and upon a pretence of being made the only true Christians in the world, are seduced from *Humanity* it self, and so far from being made good *Christians* by these Principles, that they are hardly left to be *Men*; *being blinded, and led by the blind, they fall into the ditch* of the grossest and foulest Immoralities; such as are plainly enough condemn'd by the light of Nature, if there were no Bible in the World.

Not but that we Protestants have our Faults and our Follies too, and those (God knows) too many and too visible; we possess more Truth, but there is little Peace among us; and yet God is as well and as often in Scripture called *the God of peace*, as *the God of truth*. In this great Light and Liberty of the Reform'd Religion,

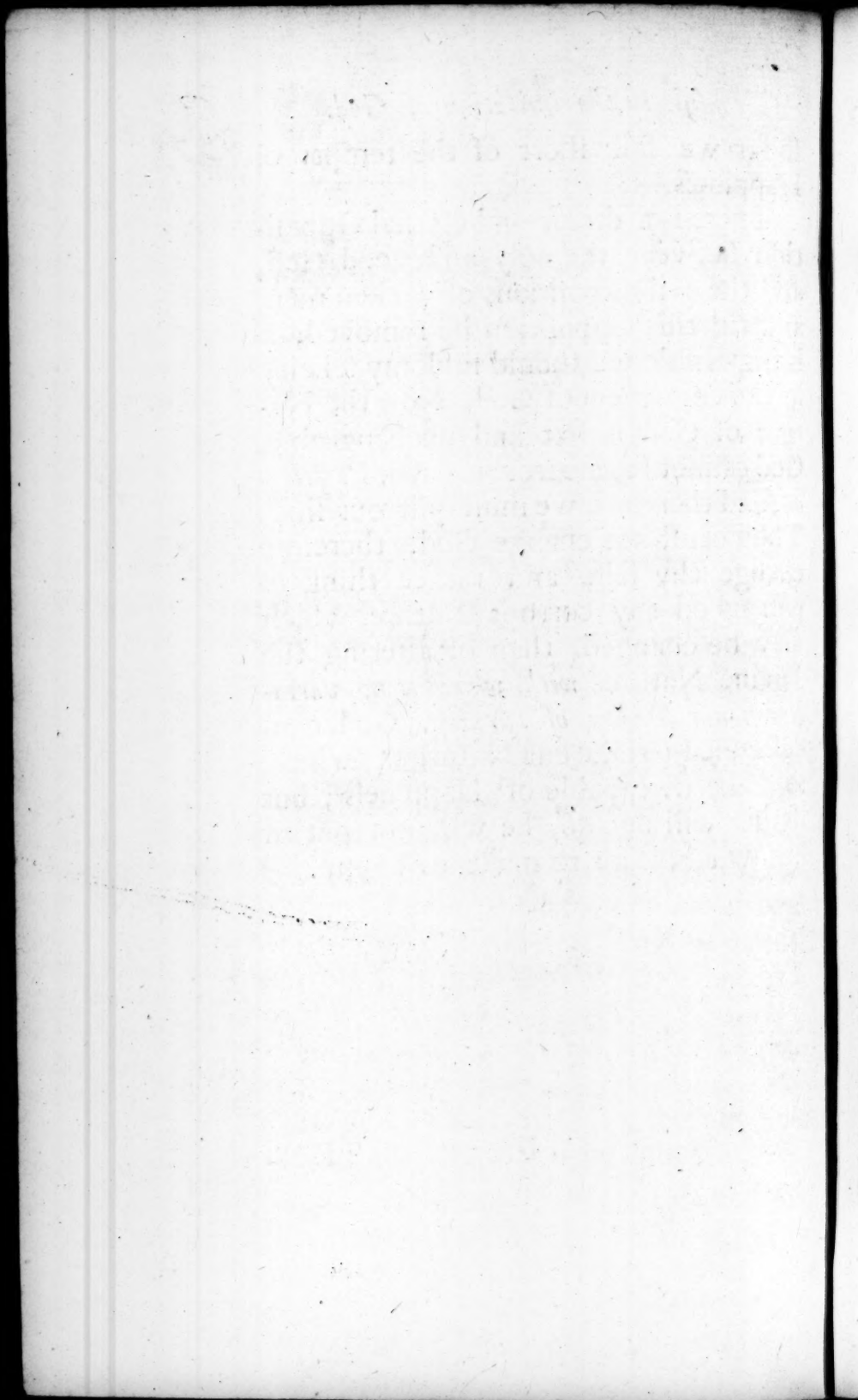
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gion, we are apt to be wanton, and to quarrel and fall out ; we are full of Heats and Animofities, of Schiſms and Diviſions, *and the way of peace we have not known.* God grant that at laſt *in this our day* (when it concerns us ſo much) we may *know the things that belong to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.*

You ſee in what things the Practice of Religion mainly conſiſts, in our likenefs to God, and reſemblance of him in Holineſs and Goodneſs ; and without this we are utterly incapable of happineſs: we cannot *ſee God*, unleſs *we be like him.* The Preſence of God can adminiſter no Pleaſure, no Felicity to us, till we be changed into his Image ; till we come to this temper, to hate Sin, and delight in purity and holineſs, we can have no delightful communion with the holy God ; till our Paſſions be ſubdued, and our Souls diſpoſſeſt of thoſe devilish and ungodlike Qualities of Hatred and Malice, of Revenge and Impatience, and till we be endowed with the Spirit of univerſal Goodneſs and Charity, we are not fit company for our heavenly Father ; we are not qualified *to dwell with God*, who is *love and dwells in love.* So far as we are defective in theſe Divine Qualities and Perfections,

so far we fall short of the temper of  Vol. VI.
Happiness.

There is a direct and eternal Opposition between the holy and good God, and the evil dispositions of wicked men, and till this Opposition be removed, it is impossible we should find any felicity in the enjoyment of God. Now the Nature of God is fixt and unchangeable, God cannot recede from his own *Perfection*, and therefore we must quit our sins : Thou canst not change God, therefore change thy self, and rather think of putting off thy corrupt Nature, which may be changed, than of altering the Divine Nature, *with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning*. God condescended to take our Nature upon him, to make us capable of Happiness ; but if this will not do, he will not put off his own Nature to make us happy.



SERMON III.

The Happiness of God.

1 TIM. I. II. *The Blessed God*—

The whole Verse runs thus,
*According to the glorious Gospel of the
 Blessed God, which was committed to my
 trust.*

SINCE all Men naturally desire happiness, and thirst after it; methinks we should all desire to know what it is, and where it is to be found, and how it is to be attained by us, in that degree in which Creatures are capable of it. What *Job* says of *Wisdom*, may be said also of *Happiness*, *God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof.* He only, who is perfectly possess of it himself, knows wherein it consists, and what are the true ingredients of it.


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So

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So that to direct us in our search after happiness, the best way will be to Contemplate and Consider the Divine Nature, which is the perfect Pattern and Idea of *Happiness*, and the Original Spring and Fountain of all the Felicity that Creatures are capable of. And to that end, I have pitched upon these Words, wherein the Apostle attributes this Perfection of *blessedness* or *happiness* to God, *The Blessed God*.

And tho' this be as Essential a part as any other of that Notion which Mankind have of God from the Light of Nature, yet I no where find in all the New Testament, this Attribute of *Happiness* given to God, but only twice in this Epistle. 'Tis true indeed, the Title of *Blessedness* is frequently given both to God and Christ, but in another Sense, and in a quite different Notion: As *Mark* 14. 61. where the High-Priest asks our Saviour, *Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed*, τὸ εὐλογητὸν, of him that is to be Celebrated and Praised; and *2 Cor.* 11. 31. *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for evermore*. So likewise, *Rom.* 1. 25. *The Creator, blessed for evermore*: Which likewise is said of Christ, *Rom.* 9. 5. *Of whom Christ*

Christ came, who is over all, God Blessed  Vol. VI.
 for evermore ; that is, for ever to be
 praised and celebrated. But in all these
 Texts the Greek Word is εὐλογητός,
 which tho' we Translate *Blessed*, yet it
 is a quite different Notion from the Title
 of *Blessedness* which is given to God in
 the Text, where the Word is not εὐλο-
 γητός, but μακάριος, *the Blessed*, or *the*
Happy God ; and this Title is not any
 where in all the New Testament, (that
 I know of) given to God, but here in
 the Text, and Chap. 6. v. 15. where
 our Lord Jesus Christ (who also is God)
 is called *the blessed and the only Potentate*.
 And whether this Title of *the Blessed*,
 or *the Happy God*, be here in the Text
 given to God the Father, or to his *Eter-*
nal Son, our Lord Jesus Christ ; is not
 so much material to my present purpose
 to enquire. For, suppose it be Christ
 who is here call'd *the Blessed God* ; this
 however is certain, that *Blessedness* or
Happiness is a Title belonging to God,
 which is all that is necessary for a Foun-
 dation of my present Discourse.

In speaking of this Argument, I shall
 do these *three* Things.

I. Shew what we are to understand
 by the *happiness* of God, and what

are the essential Ingredients of it.
 Vol. VI. II. That this Title doth belong to God, and that the Divine Nature is perfectly *blessed* and *happy*.

III. How far Creatures are capable of *Happiness*, and by what Ways and Means they may be made partakers of it: And shall then make some Inferences from my Discourse upon this Argument.

I. I will consider what we are to understand by the *blessedness* or *happiness* of God, and what are the essential Ingredients of it. Now the Notion of *happiness* taken at its highest pitch (as we must necessarily do when we apply it to God) is no other than a fixt and immoveable state of Contentment and Satisfaction, of Pleasure and Delight, resulting from the secure possession, and enjoyment of all that is good and desirable, that is, of all Excellency and Perfection; so that these following Ingredients must go to make up a perfect state of *happiness*.

1. Perfect Knowledge, to understand what it is that constitutes *happiness*, and to know when one is really possesst of it. For as he is not *happy*, who is so only in Imagination or a Dream, without any

any real Foundation in the thing; for he may be pleased with his Condition, and yet be far enough from being truly happy: So on the other hand, he that has all other necessary Ingredients of *happiness*, and only wants this, that he doth not think himself so, cannot be happy. For this we often see in the imperfect felicity of this World, that many Men who have all the Materials and Circumstances of a worldly *happiness* about them, yet by the unskilful management of the matter, and from a lightness and injudiciousness of Mind, not knowing when they are well, they make an hard shift, even when they are in as good Circumstances as it is almost possible for Men to be in this World, to be very discontented and miserable in their own Opinions. But God perfectly knows both what makes *happiness*, and that he is possessor of it.

2. To perfect *happiness* is likewise requir'd a full Power to do whatever conduceth to *happiness*, and likewise to check and control whatever would be an hindrance and disturbance to it; and therefore no Being is as happy as it can be, that is not All-sufficient, and hath not within its Power and Reach whatever

is necessary to an happy Condition, and
 Vol. VI. necessary to secure and continue that
happiness against all Attempts and Accidents whatsoever.

3. There is Wisdom also requir'd to direct this Power, and manage it in such a manner, as it may effectually conduce to this end; and this is very different from meer Power, abstractedly consider'd; for one may have all the Materials of *happiness*, and yet want the Wisdom and Skill to put them so together, as to frame an happy Condition out of them; and he is not happy, who doth not thoroughly understand the proper method and means of compassing and securing his own *happiness*.

4. Another most considerable and essential Ingredient of *happiness* is Goodness; without which, as there can be no true Majesty and Greatness, so neither can there be any *felicity* or *happiness*. Now Goodness is a generous disposition of Mind to communicate and diffuse it self, by making others partakers of its *happiness* in such degrees as they are capable of it, and as Wisdom shall direct: For he is not so happy as he may be, who hath not the pleasure of making others so, and of seeing them put into an
 happy

happy Condition by his means, which is the highest pleasure (I had almost said *pride*, but I may truly say *glory*) of a good and great Mind: For by such Communications of himself, an Immense and Allsufficient Being doth not lessen himself, or put any thing out of his Power, but doth rather enlarge and magnifie himself; and does, as I may say, give great Ease and Delight to a full and fruitful Being, without the least diminution of his Power or Happiness. For the Cause and Original of all other Beings, can make nothing so independent upon it self, as not still to maintain his Interest in it, to have it always under his Power and Government; and no Being can Rebel against his Maker, without extream hazard to himself.

5. Perfect *happiness* doth imply the exercise of all other Virtues, which are suitable to so perfect a Being, upon all proper and fitting occasions; that is, that so perfect a Being do nothing that is contrary to, or unbecoming his Holiness and Righteousness, his Truth and Faithfulness, which are essential to a perfect Being, and for such a Being to act contrary to them in any case, would be to create disquiet and disturbance to it self:

For

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For this is a certain Rule, and never fails, that nothing can act contrary to its own Nature without reluctancy and displeasure, which in moral Agents is that which we call *Guilt* ; for *Guilt* is nothing else but the Trouble and Disquiet which ariseth in one's Mind, from the consciousness of having done something which is contrary to the perfective Principles of his Being, that is, something that doth not become him, and which, being what he is, he ought not to have done ; which we cannot imagine ever to befall so perfect and immutable a Being as God is.

6. Perfect *happiness* implies in it the settled and secure Possession of all those Excellencies and Perfections ; for if any of these were liable to fail, or be diminish'd, so much would be taken off from perfect and compleat *Happiness*. If the Deity were subject to any change, or impairment of his Condition, so that either his Knowledge, or Power, or Wisdom, or Goodness, or any other Perfection, could any ways decline or fall off, there would be a proportionable abatement of *happiness*. And from all these does result in the

7th, and last place, Infinite Contentment


Contentment and Satisfaction, Pleasure and Delight, which is the very *Essence* of *happiness*. Vol. VI.

1. Infinite Contentment and Satisfaction in this Condition. And well may *happiness* be contented with it self; that is, with such a Condition, that he that is possesse of it, can neither desire it should be better, nor have any cause to fear it should be worse.

2. Pleasure and Delight, which is something more than Contentment: For one may be contented with an Affliction and painful Condition, in which he is far from taking any Pleasure and Delight. *No affliction is joyous for the present, but grievous*, as the Apostle speaks, *Heb. 12.* But there cannot be perfect *happiness* without Pleasure in our Condition. Full Pleasure is a certain mixture of Love and Joy, hard to be express'd in Words, but certainly known by inward Sense and Experience.

And thus I have endeavour'd to describe to you, as well as I could, according to our imperfect Conceptions and Expressions of God, the *happiness* of the Divine Nature, and wherein it consists. I proceed to the

II. Thing I propos'd, which was to shew,

 shew, that this Attribute of Perfection
 Vol. VI. doth belong to God; and that the Divine Nature is *perfectly Blessed and Happy*; and this is so universal an acknowledgment of Natural Light, that it would be a very superfluous and impertinent Work, to trouble you with particular Citations of Heathen Authors to this purpose; nothing being more frequent in them, than to call the Deity, *beatissimam & perfectissimam naturam, the most happy and most perfect Being*, and therefore *happy*, because Felicity doth naturally result from *Perfection*. It shall suffice to take notice of these *Two* things out of Heathen Writers, to my present purpose.

1. That they accounted *happiness* so essential to the Notion of a God, that this was one of the Ways which they took to find out what Properties were fit to attribute to God, and what not, to consider what things are consistent with *happiness*, or inconsistent with it; and whatever did signify *happiness*, and was a perfection consistent with it, they ascribed to God, as a suitable Property of the Divine Nature; and whatever was otherwise, they remov'd it from God, as unfit to be said of Him.

2. What

2. Whatever differences there were among the Philosophers concerning the *Perfections* of the *Divine Nature*, they all agreed in the *perfect felicity* of it ; even *Epicurus* himself, who so boldly attempted to strip the *Divine Nature* of most of its Perfections, by denying that God either made or govern'd the World, whereby he took away at once his being the first Cause and Original of all things, and his Goodness likewise, and Wisdom, and Power, and Justice ; or, at least made all these useless, by taking away all occasion and opportunity for the exercise of them ; yet this Man does frequently own, and profess to believe the *happiness* of the *Divine Nature* ; and then out of an ignorant, and officious kindness to the Deity, and (as he pretended) for the security of his Felicity, did in effect take away his other Perfections ; he would by no means put God to the Trouble and Burden of making the World, or taking care of the Affairs of it, lest this should discompose the Deity, or be an interruption or disturbance of his Ease and Felicity. For thus *Lucretius*, the great Disciple of *Epicurus*, describes his Opinion of the *Divine Nature*,

Omnis

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Omnis enim divûm, per se, natura ne-
cesse est,
Immortali ævo summâ cum pace fru-
atur,
Semota à nostris rebus, sejunctaque
longè.
Nam privata dolore omni, privata pe-
riclis,
Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga
nostrî.
Nec benè pro meritis capitur, nec tan-
gitur irâ.

That is, *It is necessary that the Divine Nature should be Happy, and therefore altogether unconcern'd in our Affairs; free from all grief and danger, sufficient for it self, and standing in need of no body, neither pleased with our Good Actions, nor provoked by our Faults.* This was a very false Notion both of God and Happiness, to imagine that the Care of the World should be a pain and disturbance to Infinite Knowledge, and Power, and Goodness. But this is not now my business to consider; that which is to my present purpose, is, That the happiness of the Divine Nature was Universally owned; and that blessedness is so

so inseparable from the Notion of a Deity, that whoever professes to believe a God, must acknowledge him to be perfectly happy. Vol. VI.

As for the Testimony of Scripture, I have already told you, that there are but two Texts wherein this Title of *μακάριος*, the happy or blessed, is given to God; but by consequence the Scripture every where declares the happiness of the Divine Nature, viz. wherever it speaks of the Excellency and Perfection of his Being, of his Knowledge, and Power, and Wisdom, and Goodness, and Righteousness, and of the Eternity and Unchangeableness of these, and of the infinite Delight and Complacency which he takes in the Enjoyment of these perfections. I shall now proceed to the

III. And last thing, which I proposed to consider, viz. How far *Creatures* are capable of happiness, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it. They are not capable of absolute and perfect happiness, because that results from infinite perfection, which is no where to be found but in God: It remains then that *Creatures* are only capable of being happy in a finite and limited degree, by the resemblance of God,
and

Vol. VI. and by the enjoyment of him ; by being like to him, and by our likeness to him, being qualified for his favour, and for the enjoyment of him.

As we are *Creatures* of a *finite Power*, and limited Understandings, and a mutable Nature, we do necessarily want many of those *perfections*, which are the Cause and Ingredients of a *perfect happiness*. We are far from being sufficient for our own happiness ; we are neither so of our selves, nor can we make our selves so by our own Power ; for neither are we wise enough for our own direction, nor good enough for our own satisfaction. All the *happiness* that we are capable of is , by communication from him, who is the Original and Fountain of it ; by our being made *partakers of the Divine Nature*, (as St. Peter speaks) by our resemblance of God in those *perfections* which are the most essential Ingredients of *happiness*, his Goodness, and Righteousness, and Truth, and Holiness ; these do immediately qualify us for the Favour and Friendship of Almighty God , and for the blessed sight and enjoyment of him ; and the Favour of God, and the Light of his Countenance lifted up upon us, and his Friendship

Friendship and Good-Will to us, supplies all the defects of Power and Wisdom in us: For God being our Friend, we have an Interest in all his *Perfections*, and a Security, that as occasion requires, they will all be employ'd for our benefit and advantage; so that tho' we are *weak in our selves*, we are *strong in the Lord*, and in the power of his might, and are able to do all things through him *strengthening us*; and tho' we want *Wisdom*, we may have free recourse to the Fountain of it, and ask it of God, who gives to all *liberally*, and *upbraideth not*. And it is next to having these *perfections* in our selves, to know where to have them for asking, whenever we stand in need of them, so far as is necessary to our *happiness*.

So that tho' our happiness depend upon another, yet if we be careful to qualify our selves for it, (and God is always ready to assist us by his Grace to this purpose) it is really and in effect in our own power; and we are every whit as safe and happy in God's care and protection of us, as if we were sufficient for our selves. However this is the highest *happiness* that the Condition of a *Creature* is capable of, to have all our
G defects

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 Vol. VI. defects supply'd in so liberal a manner by the Bounty of another, and to have a free recourse to the Fountain of Happiness, and at last to be admitted to the Blessed sight and enjoyment of Him, *in whose presence is fulness of Joy, and at whose right hand are Pleasures for evermore.* I have done with the *Three Things* I proposed to speak to.

But to what purpose, may some say, is this long Description and Discourse of *happiness*? How are we the Wiser and the Better for it? I Answer; very much, in several respects.

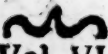
1. This plainly shews us, That *Atheism* is a very melancholy and mischievous thing; it would take away the *Fountain of happiness*, and the only perfect *Pattern* of it; it endeavours at once to extinguish the Being of God, and all the Life and Comfort of Mankind, so that we could neither form any Idea of *happiness*, or be in any possibility of attaining it. For it is plain, we are not sufficient for it of our selves; and if there be not a God, there is nothing that can make us so? God is *the true light of the World*, and a thousand times more necessary to the comfort and happiness of Mankind, than the Sun it self, which is  
 but

but a dark Shadow of that infinitely more bright and glorious Being; *the* Vol. VI. *happy and only Potentate* (as the Apostle describes him in the latter end of this Epistle) *who only hath immortality, dwelling in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see,* meaning in this mortal state.

So that the greatest Enemies, and most injurious of all others to Mankind, are those who would banish the Belief of a God out of the World; because this is to lay the Ax to the root of the Tree, and at one blow to cut off all Hopes of happiness from Mankind. So that he is a Fool indeed, that says in his heart there is no God; that is, that wisheth there were none; because it is not possible for a Man to wish worse to himself, and more effectually to destroy his own happiness.

2. If the Divine Nature be so infinitely and compleatly happy, this is a very great confirmation of our Faith and Hope concerning the happiness of another Life, which the Scripture describes to us, by the Sight and Enjoyment of God. As we are Creatures, we are not capable of the happiness that is absolutely and infinitely perfect, because our Nature is but finite, and limited; but the blessed



 Vol. VI. God who is *infinitely happy* himself, can al-  
so make us *happy* according to our *finite*  
Measure and Capacity. For, as he that  
is the First and Original Being, can com-  
municate Being to other things, so He  
that is the Fountain of Happiness, can de-  
rive and convey happiness to his Crea-  
tures.

And we shall the more easily believe  
this, when we consider that *Goodness*, as  
it is the prime Perfection, so is it likewise  
the chief felicity of the Divine Nature.  
It is his Glory and Delight to commu-  
nicate himself, and shed abroad his good-  
ness; and the highest expression of the  
*Divine Goodness*, is to communicate  
happiness to his Creatures, and to be wil-  
ling that they should share and partake  
with him in it. Base and Envious Na-  
tures are narrow and contracted, and  
love to confine their Enjoyments and  
good Things to themselves, and are loth  
that others should take part with them;  
but the most Noble and most Gene-  
rous Minds are most free and enlarged,  
and cannot be happy themselves unless  
they find or make others so.

This is the highest pitch of Goodness,  
and consequently the highest Content-  
ment, and the supreme delight of the  
Divine



Divine Nature. Now it is natural to every Being, to be most frequent and abundant in those Acts in which it finds the greatest Pleasure; *to be good*, and *to do good* is the supream Felicity of God himself; therefore we may easily believe, that he is very ready and forward to make us happy, by all the ways that are agreeable to his Wisdom and Righteousness; and that He is also willing to make us abundantly so, and to advance us to the highest degree of Felicity, of which our Nature is capable, if we do not render our selves incapable of such a Blessing, by an obstinate refusal of it, and utter indisposition for it.

This, I say, is very credible, because the *happiness* of God himself consists in that propension and disposition of Nature, which tends to make others *happy*. And if there can be any accession to that which is *infinite*, God himself finds a new Pleasure and Felicity in the communication of his goodness to his Creatures, and therefore is represented in Scripture, as glad of *the Conversion of a sinner*, because the sinner hereby becomes capable of the happiness which God design'd for his Creatures,

Vol. VI. and is always ready to confer upon them, whenever they are qualified for it, and he can, with the Honour of his other Perfections, bestow it upon them.

There are *Two* things which raise our Hopes and expectation of Good from any Person; if he be *Able* and *Willing* to bestow upon us what we hope for from him. Now if any one can confer *Happiness* upon us, it is He who is *infinitely* possessor of it, and hath all the Treasures of it in himself; and *that* God only is; who, as he is *able*, so is *willing* to make us happy, if we be qualified for it; and it is no impairing of his happiness to make others happy; for even that Goodness which inclines him to communicate happiness to others, is a great part of his own Felicity; so that, as our Saviour argues, *because I live, you shall live also*; we may reason in like manner, that *because God is happy, we shall be happy also*, if we do but sincerely desire and endeavour to qualify ourselves for it. The Goodness of God does strongly incline him to desire our happiness, and makes him willing and ready to bestow it upon us, when ever we are capable to receive it.

So

So that the *Goodness* of God is the great Foundation of all our Hopes, and the firmest ground of our assurance of a Blessed Immortality. It is the happiness of the Divine Nature to communicate himself; and the communications of God's Goodness to us are the cause of our happiness; and therefore, both for our Example and Encouragement, the *Goodness* of God ought always to be represented to the greatest Advantage, and we should endeavour to possess our Minds with a firm Belief and Persuasion of it, and to remove from the Divine Nature (which we all acknowledge to have infinitely more goodness than is to be found in any of the Sons of Men) whatever we would not attribute to a good Man, and to vindicate God from all suspicion of Envy and Ill-will, of Cruelty and Arbitrary dealing with his Creatures. And I cannot apprehend why Men should be averse from these so agreeable and delightful apprehensions of God; or how it should be any Man's Interest to lessen the *Goodness* of God; for most certainly the better God is in himself, the better

Vol. VI. and happier it will be for us all, if it be not our own fault.

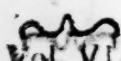
3. From what hath been said concerning the *happiness* of the *Divine Nature*, we may learn whereto *our happiness* must consist, namely, in the *Image* and in the *Favour* of God; in the *Favour* of God as the Cause of our happiness; and in the *Image* of God, as a necessary inward disposition and qualification for it. Unless God love us, we cannot be *happy*, for miserable are they whom he hates; for God to say of any Man, that *his Soul hath no pleasure in him*, imports as great Misery, and as dreadful a Curse as can be imagin'd, and *his Soul* can have no pleasure in a bad Man; for he loveth Righteousness and hateth Iniquity, he is not a God that hath pleasure in Wickedness, neither shall Evil dwell with him; the Wicked shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all the workers of Iniquity. Nay, if we could suppose that he could love and take pleasure in any Person that is unlike to him (which is impossible) yet that Person could not be *happy*, because he would want that inward Frame and Disposition of Mind, which is necessary to *happiness*.

For

For the very same Causes and Ingredients which make up *the happiness* of God, must in an inferior degree be found in us, otherwise we cannot be happy; no, tho' a Man were in Heaven, if he be still a bad Man, *Cælum, non animam mutavit*, he hath only changed the Climate, and is gone into another Countrey, but he bears himself still about him, and his Mind is not changed, which would signifie a thousand times more to his happiness, than any Place or outward Circumstance whatsoever. A bad Man, wheresoever he goes, hath a Root of Gall and Bitterness within him, and is miserable from himself; he hath a Fiend in his own Breast, and the Fuel of Hell in a guilty Conscience.


For there is a certain Temper and Disposition of Mind, that is necessary and essential to happiness, and that is holiness and goodness, which is the Nature of God; and so much as any Person departs from this Temper, so far he removes himself, and runs away from happiness: And as Sin is a departure from God, so the Punishment of it is likewise exprest by departing from him; Depart from me ye Cursed; de-  
part



 *part from me all ye that work Iniquity,*  
 Vol. VI. *I know you not.*

And this is one great part of the Misery of those degenerate and accursed Spirits, the Devils, who are for ever banish'd from the Presence of God, that they are of a Temper quite contrary to God, Wicked and Impure, Envious and Malicious, Mischievous and Cruel; and such a Temper is naturally a torment and disquiet to it self. And here the Foundation of Hell is laid in the evil disposition of our Minds; and 'till this be cur'd, and set right, it is as impossible for any of us to be *happy*, as it is for a Limb that is out of joint to be at ease. And the external presence of God, and a *local* Heaven (if we could imagine such a Person to be admitted into it, and see all the Glories of that place, and the Pleasures and Delights of that state) all this, I say, would signifie no more to make a bad Man *happy*, than heaps of Gold and Diamonds, and Comforts of the most delicious Musick, and a well-spread Table, and a rich and costly Bed would contribute to a Man's Ease in the paroxysme of a Fever,

ver, or in a violent fit of the Stone ; because the Man hath *that* within which torments him, and 'till *that* be removed, he cannot possibly be at ease. The Man's Spirit is out of order, and off the Hinges, and tost from its Centre, and 'till *that* be set right, and restor'd to its proper place and state by Goodness and Holiness, the Man will be perpetually restless, and cannot possibly have any Ease or Peace in his Mind: For how can there be Peace, how can there be *happiness* to him, who is of a Temper directly opposite to it? *The wicked, saith the Prophet, Isa. 57. 20, 21. is like the troubled Sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt.* So long as there is impurity in our Hearts, and Guilt upon our Consciences, they will be restlessly working; *there is no peace saith my God to the wicked.* The Hebrew Word which we translate *Peace*, signifies *all kind of happiness*; there can be no *felicity* to a bad Man. The consideration whereof should put us upon the most serious and earnest endeavours to be like God, that we may be capable of his Favour, and partakers of his Felicity. The Divine Nature is the only perfect

 perfect Idea of *happiness*, and nothing  
Vol. VI. but our conformity to it can make us  
*happy*.

I have been so long upon this Argument, on purpose to convince Men of the Necessity of Holiness and Goodness, and all other Virtues, to our present and future *happiness*. They understand not the nature of *happiness*, who hope for it, or imagin they can attain it in any other way. The Author and the Fountain of *happiness*, he that made us, and alone can make us *happy*, cannot make us so in any other way, than by planting in us such a disposition of Mind, as is in Truth a *participation of the Divine Nature*, and by endowing us with such Qualities as are the necessary Materials and Ingredients of *happiness*. There is no way to partake of the *Felicity of God blessed for ever*, but by becoming Holy and Righteous, Good and Merciful as he is.

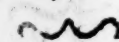
All Men naturally desire *happiness*, and seek after it, and are as they think travelling towards it, but generally they mistake their way. Many are eager in the pursuit of the Things of this World, and greedily catch at Pleasures

fures and Riches and Honour, as if *these* could make them happy; but when they come to embrace them, they find that they are but Clouds and Shadows, and that there is no real and substantial *felicity* in them. *Many say, who will shew us any good?* meaning the good things of this World, Corn, and Wine, and Oil; But wouldst thou be happy indeed? endeavour to be like the Pattern of happiness, and the Fountain of it; Address thy self to him in the Prayer of the Psalmist, *Lord lift thou up upon me the light of thy Countenance, and that shall put more joy and gladness into my heart, than the Men of the World can have, when their Corn and their Wine increaseth.*

Many say, *lo here, and lo there!* That happiness is in a great Place, or in a plentiful Estate, or in the enjoyment of sensual Pleasures and Delights; but believe them not; happiness is something that is nearer and more intimate to us, than any of the Things of this World; it is *within thee, in thine heart, and in the very inward frame and disposition of thy mind.*

In a Word, if ever we would be happy, we must be like the Blessed God, we must

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Vol. VI.  must be *holy*, and *merciful*, and *good*, and *just*, as he is, and then we are secure of his Favour; for *the righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance will behold the upright*. Then we shall be qualified for the enjoyment of him, and take pleasure in communion with him, because we shall be like him. For the surest foundation of Love and Friendship is a similitude of Temper and Disposition; every thing naturally affects its own likeness, and moves towards it, and greedily catcheth at it, and gladly runs into the Embraces of it. God and Man must be like one another, before they can take pleasure in one another: If we be unlike to God, it is in the nature of the thing impossible that we should be *happy* in one another, and therefore there must be a change either in God or us, to bring about this likeness. The Nature of God is inflexible, fixt, and unchangeable; therefore change thyself Sinner, and endeavour to be like God; for since he cannot depart from his Holiness, and Purity, thou must leave thy Sins, and *be holy as he is holy*, if ever thou hopest to be *happy*,



*in the Image and Favour of God.*

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*as he is: Every Man that hath this*  
*Hope in him, must purifie himself, even*  
*as he is pure.*

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*Now to this happy and only Potentate,  
King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, who  
only hath Immortality, and dwelleth in that  
Light which no Man can approach unto,  
whom no Man hath seen, nor can see; To  
him be Honour, and Power everlasting.  
Amen.*

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## SERMON

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in the large hall of the  
as he had been told  
that he was to be  
in the hall of the

Now to the point of the  
King of the  
only this  
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# SERMON IV.

## The Unchangeableness of God.

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JAMES I. 17.

*With whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.*

The whole Period runs thus,

*Do not err, my beloved Brethren, every good Gift, and every perfect Gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.*

**T**HE connexion and dependance of these Words upon the former is briefly this; the Apostle had asserted before, that God is not the Author of Sin and Evil, v. 13, 14. *Let no Man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God is untemptable by evil, neither tempteth he any Man: but every Man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of*  
H his

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*his own lust, and enticed ; and here in the* Text he asserts, that God is the Fountain and Author of all Good ; *do not exy, my beloved Brethren ; as if he had said, do not mistake me, tho' Sin and Evil be not from God, but from our selves, and our own corrupt hearts ; yet all good is from God, and not from our selves : tho' we be the Authors of the sins we commit ; yet we are not so of the good that we do, that is from God ; every good Gift, and every perfect Gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.* Sin which is nothing but Evil and Imperfection, is not from God, but wholly from our selves ; but whatever is good and perfect, is not from our selves, but from God ; we are neither inclined to that which is good, nor are able of our selves to perform it ; both the inclination and the power are from God, who is the Fountain of goodness and perfection, and can never be otherwise, and can never change nor cease to be so, *for with him is no variableness nor shadow of turning.*

*Every good Gift, and every perfect Gift ; all that goodness, and all those degrees of perfection, which are in the Creatures, in the highest Angels or Saints, in the best*

best of the Sons of Men, whatever there is of Excellency and Perfection, of Goodness or Happiness in any of them, *is from above*, that is from Heaven, it is *the gift of God*, and cometh down from that perfect good and glorious Being, whom the Apostle here calls *the Father of Lights*, in allusion to the Sun, which is a kind of universal Benefactor to the World, and liberally dispenseth his Light and Heat and Influence upon all things here below: but then there is this difference, the Sun changeth its habitudes and positions in reference to us, and varies its Shadows, it riseth and sets, comes nearer to us, and goes farther from us; but it is otherwise with this intellectual and immaterial Sun, *the Father of Lights*, *with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning*, παραλλαγὴ ἢ τροπὴς ἀποσείασμα, which are all astronomical words; the first παραλλαγὴ signifies the various habitudes and positions wherein the Sun appears to us every Day, at its rising, in the Meridian, and when it sets; τροπὴ is a word which belongs not to the daily, but to the yearly course of the Sun, which is nearer to us, or farther from us, as he approacheth nearer towards the Northern or Southern Tropicks;

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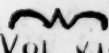
and hence it is that it casts several  
 Vol. VI. shadows to People in several Countries;  
 and agreeably to this, the Word  
*ἀποσκίασμα*, casting of shadows, being  
 joyned with *τροπή*, signifies the varia-  
 tion of the shadows according to the  
 Course and Motion of the Sun.

But God is an Eternal Spring of  
 Light, which never riseth or sets,  
 which hath no mixture of shadow nor  
 darkness, hath no changes nor varia-  
 tions, but is always the same free and  
 liberal dispenser of good things to his  
 Creatures; *the Father of Lights, with  
 whom is no variableness nor shadow of turn-  
 ing*; which Words signify *the immuta-  
 ble perfection and goodness of the Divine  
 Nature*, which shall (by Gods assist-  
 ance) be the subject of my present Dis-  
 course; In which I shall proceed in this  
 Method.

*First*, I shall briefly explain what is  
 meant by the *immutability*, or *unchangea-  
 bleness*, of the Divine Nature.

*Secondly*, I shall shew that this is a  
 perfection essential to God, to be *immu-  
 tably* what he is, that is *good* and *per-  
 fect*.

*Thirdly*, I shall answer an Objection  
 which lies against it, from the mention  
 so

so often made in Scripture of God's *repenting himself*. And   
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*Fourthly*, Apply the Consideration of it to our selves.

I. For the Explication of it. By the *immutability* of God, we mean that he always is, and was, and to all Eternity will be the same, that he undergoes no changes either of his Essence and Being, or of his Properties and Perfections. In reference to the *unchangeableness* of his being, he is said to be *eternal, incorruptible, and only to have immortality*. In reference to his *perfections*, he is always the same infinitely Wise, and Good, and Powerful, and Holy, and just Being; from whence it follows, that he is Constant and Immutable in all his Decrees and Counsels, his Purposes and Promises. We are uncertain and mutable in our very Nature and Beings, and in all those Qualities and Perfections which belong to us, in all our Purposes, Resolutions and Actions; we are continually growing or decreasing in this or that quality, and do frequently change from one extremum to another, from that which is more perfect to the contrary, now knowing, and then ignorant, sometimes wise, and oftner foolish, stronger

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and weaker, better or worse, as it happens, and as we order our selves, continually waxing or waining in our Knowledge, and Wisdom, and Goodness, and Power; we frequently change our Minds, and alter our Purposes, and break our Promises, and contradict our firmest and most serious Resolutions, and speak a thing and do it not, say it and do not bring it to pass; but God is everlastingly the same in all his Perfections, constant to his Intentions, steady to his Purpose, immutably fixt and persevering in all his Decrees and Resolutions. I proceed to the

II. Thing I proposed, namely, To shew that this *Perfection* is essential to God, to be *unchangeably* what he is. And this I shall endeavour to make manifest both from Natural Reason, and from the Divine Revelation of the Holy Scriptures.

I. From the Dictates of natural Reason, which tells us, that nothing Argues greater weakness and imperfection than Inconstancy and Change. This is the great Vanity of all Creatures, that they are uncertain, and do not long continue in one state; this is the vanity of the World in general, that *the fashion*  
of

of it passeth away; and of Man in particular, that he is liable to so many natural changes, by Age, and Diseases, and Death, for which Reason he is said by the Psalmist, to be *in his best estate altogether vanity*; and that he is liable to so many moral changes, to be deluded and deceived in his Understanding, and to alter his Opinion so often, to be so fickle in his Will, and to change so often his Purposes and Resolutions, according to the alteration or appearance of things. We attribute Change and Inconstancy to Persons of the weakest Age and Understanding, as Children, who are liable *to be tost to and fro, and carried about with every wind*, as the Apostle speaks, *Eph. 4. 14.*

Now if the Divine Nature were subject to change, this would cast an universal Cloud upon all the Divine Perfections, and obscure all other Excellencies, and make them *like the flower of the field*, which, how gay and glorious soever, is fading and perishing; and the greater the Divine Perfections are, the greater Imperfection would mutability be; for as *the corruption of the best things is the worst*, so the better any thing

is, so much the worse it would be to have it liable to Corruption and Change.


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And as mutability in God would darken all his other Perfections, so would it take away the Foundation and comfort of all Religion; the ground of our Faith, and Hope, and Fear, of our Love and Esteem of God would be quite taken away. We could have no great Honour or Esteem for a Being that is fickle and inconstant; if his Power and Justice were uncertain, his Threatings would in a great measure lose their awe and force; if his Truth and Faithfulness could fail, no Promises and Declarations, how gracious soever, would be any security or firm ground of Trust and Confidence.

And this Reasoning is not the result of *Divine Revelation*, but clearly founded in the *natural* Notions and Suggestions of our Minds, as will appear by citing one or two Testimonies to this purpose, of those who had no other Guide but Natural Light. *Plato* in his *Phædo* enquires, "Whether the most perfect (that is God) be always the same, or sometimes thus, and sometimes otherwise, that is (saith he) whether that which is Equality and Goodness and  
"Bounty

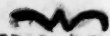


“Bounty it self, receives any the least  
 “Change at any time, and be not Con-  
 “stant and Uniform, and of it self al-  
 “ways the same, Καὶ ἐδαμῇ ἐδαμῶς  
 “ἀλλοίωσιν ἐδεμίαν ἐνδέχεται, and is ne-  
 “ver in any wise upon, any account,  
 “subject to any Change or Alteration  
 “whatsoever? To which he answers,  
 “That it is necessary that he should  
 “be the same and always alike. And  
*lib. 2. de Repub.* where he lays down  
 the Fundamental Laws and Constituti-  
 tions of Religion, he mentions these  
*two* (which one would almost think he  
 borrow'd from St. James, but that he  
 lived so long before him) viz. First,  
 “That God is the Cause of all good, and  
 “and in no wise of any evil; answerab-  
 ly to what our Apostle here asserts,  
 that God cannot be tempted with evil,  
 neither tempteth he any Man: but that  
 every good and perfect gift is from him.  
 Secondly, “That God doth not deceive  
 “us, by making various Representa-  
 “tions of himself to us, sometimes in  
 “one form, and sometimes in another;  
 “for he is unchangeable and always  
 “the same, and cannot, τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἰδέας  
 “ἐκβαίνειν, pass out of his own Idea, or  
 “be any other than what he is; which  
 he

 he further confirms by this excellent Reasoning, "That which is the best and  
 Vol. VI. "most perfect Being is not liable to a-  
 "ny Alteration; but such a Being is  
 "God, and therefore he cannot be chang-  
 "ed by any thing that is weaker and  
 "less perfect than himself, and he can-  
 "not will to change himself; for if he  
 "should, it must either be for the better  
 "or for the worse; it cannot be for the  
 "better, for being already possess'd of all  
 "Perfection, there can be no accession  
 "of any to him by any change; and  
 "certainly there is no Wise Being, as  
 "God is, that will change for the worse,  
 and therefore he concludes, καλλίστος καὶ  
 ἀριστος ὢν, εἰς τὸ δυνατόν μένει αἰεὶ ἀπλῶς  
 καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ μορφῇ, "That being the good-  
 "liest and best Being that is possible,  
 "he always continues simply the same.  
*Seneca* likewise speaking of the immuta-  
 bility of God's Counsels (*l. 6. de Benef.*)  
*Statuerunt* (says he) *que non mutarent,*  
*neque unquam primi consilii Deos pœnitet,*  
 "The Gods make unchangeable decrees,  
 "and never repent them of their first  
 "counsel.

2. This will yet more clearly appear  
 from the Divine Revelation of the  
 Holy Scriptures, which tell us that God  
 is

is *unchangeable* in his Nature and in his Perfections, in all his Decrees and Purposes and Promises. In his *essence* and *being*, *Exod. 3. 14. I am that I am*, this is his Name, whereby he made known himself to the comfort of his People, and to the terrour of the *Egyptians* their Oppressors. *Psal. 90. 2. From everlasting to everlasting thou art God. Psal. 102. 27. Thou art the same, and thy years fail not. Mat. 3. 6. I am the Lord and change not.* Hence it is that the Title of the *living God* is so frequently attributed to him; and he swears by this, as denoting not only his *eternity*, but his *unchangeableness*; *As I live, saith the Lord.* Hither likewise we may refer those Texts where he is call'd the *incorruptible God*, *Rom. 1. 23; The immortal King, 1 Tim. 1. 17;* and is said *only to have immortality, 1 Tim. 1. 16.* And he is *immutable* likewise in his *perfections*; hence it is so often said in the *Psalms*, that *his goodness* and *his mercy* endure for ever; *his righteousness* likewise is said to endure for ever. *Psal. 111. 3. and Psal. 36. 6; To be like the great Mountains*, not only *visible* and *conspicuous*, but *firm* and *immoveable*; and the same likewise is said of his *truth* and *faithfulness*, *Psal. 117. 2. His truth*  
endu-

 Vol. VI. endureth for ever ; and of his power Esa. 26. 4. *In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.*

And so likewise in his *Decrees and Purposes and Promises*, Psal. 33. 11. *The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all generations ;* Esa. 14. 24. *Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass, and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.* Numb. 23. 19. *God is not a Man that he should lie, or as the Son of Man that he should repent ; hath he spoken, and shall not he do it ? hath he said it, and shall not he bring it to pass ?* If he hath made any promise, or entred into any Covenant with us, it is firm and immutable, Psal. 89. 33. *He will not suffer his faithfulness to fail, his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his lips.* His Covenant and his Promise are in themselves immutable ; but for our further assurance, God hath given us his Oath, the highest sign of Immutability ; so the Apostle to the *Hebrews* tells us, chap. 6. 18. *That by two immutable things, (viz his Promise and his Oath) in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who are fled for refuge to the hope which is set before us.* I proceed to the

III. Thing I propos'd, which is to answer an Objection, which may seem to lie against what hath been said, from the mention so often made in Scripture of *God's repenting himself*; as *Gen. 6. 6.* where it is said that *it repented God that he had made Man*; *1 Sam. 15. 11.* That *he repented that he had made Saul King*; and *2 Sam. 24. 16.* When the Angel had stretch'd out his hand over Jerusalem to destroy it, it is said that *the Lord repented him of the evil*; and *Psal. 135. 14.* the Lord saith there that *he will repent himself concerning his servants.*

To all which I answer, That this expression of *God's repenting* we are to understand (as many others in Scripture) after the manner of Men, and as spoken by way of Condescension and Accommodation to our Weakness and Capacity, and not as casting any imputation of Mutability and Inconstancy upon God, as if out of levity or for want of foresight, he did alter his Mind; but when God is said to *repent that he made Man*, or that *he made Saul King*, the change was not in *him*, but *them*; and it signifies not that God was absolutely deceived in his expectation, but that things had fallen out contrary

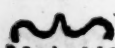


**W** contrary to all reasonable Expectation ;  
 Vol. VI. and therefore the Scripture cloaths God  
 with the Humane Passion of *repenting*  
 and *grieving* for what he had done, as  
 Men use to do when they are greatly  
 disappointed and fall short of their Ex-  
 pectation.

And as for the other instances, where-  
 in God is said *to repent him of evils*  
*threatned*, the expression only signifies  
 thus much, that God doth not execute  
 that which seemed to us to have been his  
 peremptory purpose and resolution,  
 that is, he is pleased to do otherwise  
 than his threatening seemed openly to  
 express, because of some tacit Condition  
 implied in it, which he did not think  
 fit to acquaint us with. And this doth  
 not at all derogate from the *constancy*  
 and *immutability* of God ; for when God  
 did threaten, he spake what he did real-  
 ly purpose and intend, if something did  
 not intervene to prevent the Judgment  
 threatned, upon which he was resolved at  
 that time when he threatned, to be taken  
 off and to stay his Hand ; and in thus  
 doing, God doth not *mutare consilium sed*  
*sententiam* ; He doth not change his inward  
 Counsel and Purpose, but takes off the sen-  
 tence, which was past with reserved  
 condi-

conditions and unknown to us, on purpose to urge us the more effectually to Repentance. Vol. VI.

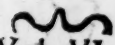
And that God usually reserves such Conditions, not only in his Threatnings, but sometimes also in his Promises, appears from that remarkable Text, *Jer. 18. 7, 8, 9, 10. At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from the evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them: at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them.* And from this very Consideration the same Prophet encourageth the People to repentance, *Jer. 26. 13. Therefore now amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of the Lord your God, and the Lord will repent him of the evil he hath pronounced against you.* And we have a famous instance of this in the case of *Niniveh*, the destruction whereof within forty days after, God had openly proclaimed by his Prophet; yet he stops the Execution of

 of the Sentence upon their Repentance,  
 Vol. VI. *Jonah 3. 10. The Men of Niniveh turned from their evil ways, and the Lord repented of the evil he said he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

All that now remains is to apply this Doctrine of the *immutability of the Divine Nature* to our selves; and the Consideration of it may serve to several good Purposes, both in reference to bad and good Men.

*First,* In regard to sinners and wicked Men.

And, *1st.* The *unchangeableness of God* is matter of great terrour to wicked Men. Let but the sinner consider what God is, and the consideration of his *unchangeable nature* must need terrifie him; *He is a holy God, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, Hab. 1. 12. He is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him, the foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity, Psal. 5. 4, 5. He is likewise a just God, and will by no means clear the guilty, nor let sin go unpunisht, Exod. 34. 7. He is also omnipotent, and able to execute the vengeance threatned against Sinners. Who knoweth the power of thine anger? Psal. 90. 11. Thou even thou art to be feared, and who may stand in thy*

thy fight when once thou art angry. Psal. 76. 

7. Strong is the Lord God who judgeth. Vol. VI.

Rev. 18. 8. And which gives a sad account to all this, he that is thus holy and just and powerful, continues for ever the same, and will never alter or put off any of these Properties, will never cease to hate iniquity, and to be an implacable Enemy to all impenitent Sinners; and is it not a fearful thing to fall into the hands of this holy and just and omnipotent God who lives for ever, and can punish for ever? Let all obstinate Sinners hear this and tremble; you cannot be more obstinately bent to continue in your wicked ways, than God is peremptorily resolved to make you miserable. If you be determined upon a sinful course; God is also determined how he will deal with you, that he will not spare, but that his anger and jealousy shall smoke against you, and that all the curses that are written in his book shall light upon you, and that he will blot out your name from under Heaven; he hath sworn in his wrath, that unbelieving and impenitent Sinners shall not enter into his rest; and for the greater assurance of the thing, and that we may not think, that there is any condition implied in these Threatnings, he hath con-

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firmed them by an Oath, that by this *immutable sign, in which it is impossible for God to lie*, Sinners might have *strong terrours*, and not be able to fly to any in hopes of refuge.

2ly. The consideration of Gods *unchangeableness*, should likewise be a very powerful Argument to urge Sinners to Repentance. If they will but leave their sins and turn to him, they will find him ready to receive them upon their Repentance and Submission; for he is a God *gracious and merciful, slow to anger and ready to forgive*, he is *unchangeably good*, and *his mercy endureth for ever*: but if they will not come in, and submit to these Terms, there is nothing before them but Ruin and Destruction, nothing then *remains but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume them*. God hath declared to us the terms of our Pardon and Peace, and if we will not come up to them, he is at a point, he cannot change his Nature, nor will he alter the terms of his Covenant; there is a perfect and eternal opposition between the Holy Nature of God, and an impenitent sinner; and 'tis impossible such an one should be Happy, till this opposition be remov'd; and to do that, there are but *two ways imaginable, by changing God*

or



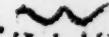
or by *changing our selves* ; the Nature of God is *fixt and unalterable* ; God cannot recede from his own pure Nature ; therefore *we* must depart from our sinful and corrupt Nature: God cannot quit his Holiness ; therefore we must leave our Sins : we can have no hope to *change God* ; therefore we must *change our selves*. Rectifie Sinner thine own corrupt Nature, and renounce thy lusts, do not venture upon Impossibilities, rather think of altering thy *sinful nature*, which *may be changed*, than of altering the *Divine Nature*, which is *essentially immutable*, with whom is no *variableness nor shadow of turning*. God hath once condescended so far, as to take our nature upon him, to make us capable of Happiness ; but if this will not do, he can go no lower, he will not, he cannot put off his own nature to make us Happy.

Secondly, In reference to Good Men, the consideration of Gods *unchangeableness* is matter of great Consolation to them, in all the changes and vicissitudes of the World ; their main comfort and hope is built upon a Rock, the rock of ages, as the expression is in the Prophet *Isaiah 26. 4.* it relies upon the *unchangeable* goodness and faithfulness of God, all whose promises are *Yea and Amen* truth and certainty. All other Support,

Vol. VI.

and Hopes may fail us: but God will not suffer his faithfulness to fail, his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing which is gone out of his lips, as the Psalmist assures us, *Psal. 89. 33.* Men may break their Word, and be less than their Promises: but God is faithful, who hath promised to give grace and glory, and to withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly; he is not as Man, that he should lie, or as the Son of Man that he should repent; hath he spoken and shall he not do it? hath he said it, and shall not he bring it to pass?

If there be any thing that hath the appearance of a change in God, it is usually on the merciful side, as when he stops the execution of his threatnings upon the repentance of a sinful Nation; as in that remarkable Text which I mention'd before, *Jer. 18. 7, 8.* *At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it, if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them; and so likewise when his faithful People and Servants are in great Distress, and there is no visible help and means of relief, in this case likewise God is said to repent*  
 and

and to appear for their rescue, *Deut. 32.*   
36. *The Lord shall judge his people, and repent himself for his servants, when he seeth that their power is gone.* Vol. VI

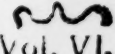
Thus we should comfort our selves in the greatest extremities, with the consideration of the *immutable* goodness and faithfulness of God. The things of the World are Mutable, and the Men of the World; even those things which seem most constant, as the Heavens; and to be settled upon the surest Foundations, as the Earth; yet these shall be changed, *Psal. 102. 25, 26, 27.* *Of old hast thou laid the foundations of the Earth, and the Heavens are the work of thy hands, they shall perish, but thou shalt endure, all of them shall wax old like a garment, as a vesture shall thou change them, and they shall be changed, but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end;* from whence the Psalmist infers this comfort to the Church and People of God, *v. 28, The Children of thy Servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee.*

Nothing that is mutable can be a solid Foundation of Comfort and Confidence. Men are inconstant, and Riches are uncertain, and all other things which

Men commonly trust to, and therefore the Apostle *chargeth them that are Rich in this World, not to trust in uncertain Riches, but in the living God.* He only that *lives for ever* is a firm Foundation of Hope and Confidence.

When God would comfort the *Israelites in Egypt* under their great Oppression, he bids *Moses* only to declare to them his *immutability*, *Exod. 3. 14.* Say unto them, *I am that I am, hath sent me unto you*; and this is the great comfort of Christians, that *he who is their Saviour, and their hope, is the same yesterday, to day, and for ever; he that was, and that is, and that is to come, in all durations the same.*

We are continually changing, and are not the same we were; some of us were Young and now are Old; once perhaps flourisht in great Prosperity, but now are Poor and Needy; were once Strong and Healthful, but now Sickly and Weak; it should comfort us in all these Changes, that *God is still the same,* and he alone is instead of all other Comforts and Supports, when all other things fail, we may *rejoyce in the Lord, and joy in the God of our Salvation.* Youth, and Health, and Riches, and Friends,  
may

may forsake us ; but God hath promised,   
 that *he will never leave us nor forsake us ;*  
 that *he will not leave us when we are old,*  
*nor forsake us when our strength faileth,*  
*when our strength fails, and our heart*  
*fails, then is he the strength of our hearts,*  
*and our portion for ever ;* and when our  
 great change shall come, and the terrors  
 of Death shall take hold of us, we have  
 still the same Comfort, *the Lord liveth,*  
*and blessed be the God of our Salvation.*

In a word, the Consideration of God's  
*immutability* should keep us fixt and un-  
 moved in all the Changes and Accidents  
 of this World, and not apt to be startled  
 and surprized at them, according to  
 that of the Psalmist, *he shall not be afraid*  
*of evil tidings, because his heart is fixed,*  
*trusting in God.* This should make us con-  
 stant to him and his truth, *stedfast and un-*  
*moveable and always abounding in the work*  
*of the Lord,* for as much as we know, that  
*our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord ;*  
 it should make us *hold fast the profession of*  
*our faith without wavering,* in full assu-  
 rance, that *God will be as good to us as his*  
*word,* and in a firm hope and perswas-  
 ion of that *Eternal Life, which God that*  
*cannot lie hath promised.*



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# SERMON V.

## The Knowledge of God

1 SAM. 2. 3.

*The Lord is a God of Knowledge.*

**I** Come now to speak of those Properties and Perfections which relate to the Divine Understanding, and Will, and Manner, and Power of acting. *Knowledge* considers things absolutely, and in themselves; *Wisdom* considers the respects and relations of things one to another, and under the Notion of Means and Ends. The *Knowledge* of God is a perfect comprehension of the Nature of all things, with all their Powers, and Qualities, and Circumstances; the *Wisdom* of God is a perfect Com-  
pre-

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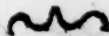
prehension of the Respects and Relations of things one to another; of their Harmony and Opposition; of their fitness and unfitness to such and such Ends. The *Knowledge* of God only implies his bare Understanding of Things; but his *Wisdom* implies the Skill of ordering and disposing things to the best Ends and Purposes, to make every thing, and to govern and administer all things in Number, Weight, and Measure. I shall, at present speak of the *first* of these, the *Knowledge* of God, which, as I said, is a perfect Comprehension of the Nature of all things, and of every thing belonging to their Nature; of the Powers, and Qualities, and Circumstances of things.

These Words signifie God to be the *Fountain of Knowledge*; that is, that he possesseth it himself, and communicates it to others. In the handling of this, I shall

*First*, Endeavour to prove, that this Attribute belongs to God.

*Secondly*, Shew the Perfection and the Prerogatives of the Divine *Knowledge*.

*Thirdly*, Draw some practical Inferences from the whole.


First, For the proof of it, I shall attempt   
it two ways, Vol. VI.

1. From the Dictates of Natural Light and Reason.

2. From Scripture or Divine Revelation.

1. From the Dictates of Natural Light and Reason. I begin with this first, because, unless this be establish'd, all Divine Revelation falls to the ground; unless Natural Reason assures us, That God is endowed with *Knowledge* and *Understanding*, it is in vain to enquire after Divine Revelation. For to make any Revelation credible, two things are requisite on the part of the Revealer, *Ability* and *Integrity*; that he have a perfect *Knowledge* and *Understanding* of the thing which he reveals, so that he cannot be deceived himself; and so much Goodness and Truth that he will not deceive us. Now unless our Reason assure us that God is endowed with *Knowledge* and *Understanding*, the first Condition is evidently wanting, viz. *Ability*, and consequently the second, *Integrity*; for there cannot be goodness and veracity without *Knowledge*.

This being premised, I proceed to the proof of it from such Arguments as  
our

 our Natural Reason suggests to us. I  
 Vol. VI. have formerly told you, that the Di-  
 vine *Perfections* are not to be proved by  
 way of *Demonstration*, but by way of  
*Conviction*, by shewing the Absurdities  
 and Inconveniencies of the contrary;  
 for if we deny Knowledge to God, we  
 must deny it to be a Perfection; we  
 must deny it to be in any of the Crea-  
 tures; we must attribute many other  
 Imperfections to God; all which are ab-  
 surd to our Natural Reason; for Natu-  
 ral Reason dictates to us, That Know-  
 ledge is a Perfection, that it is to be  
 found in the Creatures, and that the de-  
 nial of it to God will argue many other  
 Imperfections in the Divine Nature;  
 now these are so many Arguments which  
 Natural Reason offers to us to prove,  
 that *knowledge belongs to God*.

1. It is a Perfection, and therefore  
 belongs to God. Natural Reason tells  
 us, tho' the Scripture had not said it,  
 That *Knowledge excels Ignorance, as  
 much as Light doth Darknes*; now  
 whatever is *Perfect* and *Excellent*, is to  
 be attributed to the Divine Nature, for  
 this is the *first* Notion we have of God,  
 That He is a *Being absolutely Perfect*.

2. Know-



2. Knowledge is to be found in some of the Creatures, and therefore is much more in God the Creator, because it is derived from him. Our very Understandings whereby we know God, or any thing else, are an Argument that Knowledge and Understanding are in God. If he gives wisdom to the wise, and Knowledge to them that know Understanding, if he communicates this Perfection to the Creatures, he himself is much more possessed of it. The Scripture indeed useth this Argument, but I mention it as that which Natural Reason doth suggest to the most brutish and ignorant of Men. Psal. 94. 8, 9, 10. *Understand ye Brutish among the People, and ye Fools when will ye be wise? he that planted the Ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the Eye, shall he not see?*

3. The denial of this Perfection to God, argues many other Imperfections in the Divine Nature. Nothing would more eclipse the Divine Nature, than to take away this Perfection from it; this would bring an universal Obscurity upon God's other Perfections; this would be to put out the Light of Heaven, and to turn the brightness of the morning into the shadow of death. If we remove this  
Perfection

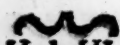
  
Vol. VI.

*Perfection* from God, we deny his *Wisdom*. He that does not know the *Nature* and *Qualities* of *Things*, cannot know how to apply *Means* to *Ends*, to fit or sute one thing to another: And we weaken his *Power*. What an impotent and ineffectual thing would *Power* be without *Knowledge*? what irregular things would it produce? what untoward *Combinations* of *Effects* would there be, if *infinite Power* were let loose to act without the *Conduct* of *Knowledge* and *Understanding*? And consequently we take away his *Providence*; for without *Knowledge* there can be no *Counsel*, no *fore-cast* of *Events*, no *provision* for the future, no *Government* of the *World*. And this is not all, for without *Knowledge* there could be no such thing as *Goodness*; for he is not good that does good out of *Ignorance*, or from a blind *Necessity*. There could be no *Veracity*, nor *Justice*, nor *Mercy* in God; for all these suppose *Knowledge*. He that speaks *Truth* must know it; he that is *Just* must understand right from wrong; he that shews *Mercy*, must know who are miserable, and how they may be relieved; and not to labour in a thing so plain and casie, take away the *Knowledge*

ledge of God, and you render him incapable of any Honour from his Creatures; for if he know not what Honour we do him, it is lost labour to give him any. And that we may see these are the deductions of Natural Reason, without the advantage of Revelation, we shall find the Heathens, who were destitute of Divine Revelation, did attribute this Perfection to God. Tully tells us, that Thales was wont to say, *Deos omnia cernere*; and we know the Heathens were wont to swear *Diis immortalibus testibus interpositis*, which is an owning of his Omniscience: *Quis enim non timeat Deum omnia pervidentem, & cogitantem, & animadvertentem, curiosum & negotiis plenum Deum*, de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

2. From Scripture and Divine Revelation. I will not heap up all those Testimonies of Scripture which might be gathered together upon this Argument; I will only instance in two or three. Job 36. 4. *He that is perfect in Knowledge, is with thee*; 37. 16. *Dost thou know the wondrous works of him who is perfect in Knowledge*.

Hither we may refer those Texts which represent God by way of condescension to our infirmity, as having  
 30  
 Eyes


 Eyes and Ears, which signifie his Knowledge of what is done in the World; and those which speak of him as communicating to us all the Knowledge which we have; *he giveth Wisdom to the Wise, and Understanding to them that know Understanding*, Dan. 2. 21. And those which speak of God, as knowing the most secret things, *the hidden things of darkness*, the Hearts and the Thoughts of Men; and those things which are at the greatest distance, as future things; and of the greatest uncertainty, as the contingent Acts of free Creatures; each of these I shall particularly consider; for in proving that God knows all these, his Knowledge of all other things will be proved with advantage; for if any thing be out of the reach of the *Divine Understanding*, it must in all probability be either those things which are secret and hidden, as Mens secret Actions, or their Thoughts; or else those things which are to come, and depend upon no certain cause, as future contingencies; and the proving of this may be of great use to us, as having a great influence upon Practice; it tends very much to the advancement of Religion, and the good Government of our Lives. I begin with the

I. Of these, viz. That God takes very exact and particular notice of all the Actions of Men, even those that are most secret. And in handling of this, I shall speak distinctly to these three Things. Vol. VI.

1. That God takes knowledge of all our actions; *his Eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings*, Job 34. 21.

2. That he is a curious observer of them; *he seeth all his goings, he marks all his steps*, takes very exact and particular notice of all that we do.

3. He takes notice of those actions which are most secret and hidden; *there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves*, Job 34, 22.

1. That God takes notice of all our actions. And that this Notion was planted in the Mind of Man, and a Beam of the Light which comes with us into the World, will appear by the general agreement of Heathens in it; I will but produce one or two Testimonies to this purpose. Tully lays down this Principle, as that which makes Men regular and orderly, and fit for Society; *sic igitur hoc persuasum civibus, qualis quis-*

K

que



que sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat de-  
 Vol. VI. os intueri. Socrates, as Xenophon tells  
 us, was wont to say, πάντα θεὸς εἰδέναι  
 καὶ πλερόμενα καὶ περσόμενα καὶ πασιγῇ  
 βεβηγόμενα. Arrian in his Discourse up-  
 on Epictetus tells us, it is necessary  
 that every one should be perswaded of  
 this, ὅτι ἕκαστον τῶν περσισμένων ἐφορεῖ-  
 ται ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ, that every thing that is  
 done by Men is seen of God.

The Scripture frequently mentions  
 this, Psal. 139. 1. &c. Prov. 5. 21. The  
 ways of Man are before the eyes of the Lord,  
 and he pondereth all his goings. Jer. 32.  
 19. Thine eyes are open upon all the ways  
 of the Sons of men, to give every one ac-  
 cording to his ways, and according to the  
 fruit of his doings.

2. He is a curious Observer, one that  
 takes exact notice of all that we do.  
 Job saith, he seeth all our steps; and So-  
 lomon, that he pondereth all our goings;  
 the word is, he weighs them in a ballance.  
 So 1 Sam. 2, 3. The Lord is a God of  
 knowledge, by him actions are weighed.  
 Job 31. 4. Doth he not see my ways, and  
 count all my steps? which doth not imply  
 the difficulty, but the Perfection and  
 exactness of God's Knowledge; he  
 knows the quality of our actions, and  
 all

all the circumstances of them, all the degrees of Good and Evil that are in them; <sup>Vol. VI.</sup> whatever may commend an action, or blemish it; whatever may aggravate a Sin or excuse it. *Isa 26. 7. Thou most upright dost weigh the path of the just.* There's not a good word that we speak but God hears it, *Mal. 3. 16. And the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him;* and all we do is noted in his Book, *Psa. 56. 8.*

3. He takes notice of those Actions which are most secret and hidden, the good as well as the bad; when we *do our alms in secret*, when we *enter into our Closets and shut the doors*, our Father seeth in secret, *Mat. 6.* Nor can we retire our selves to any place, where we can sin so as God shall not see us, where we can hide our sins from his sight, or our selves from his wrath. Hear how sensibly a Heathen speaks of this; *ὅταν κλείσητε τὰς θύρας, καὶ σκοτῶ ἐνδὸν ποιήσετε, μέμνηθε μηδέποτε λέγειν ὅτι μόνοι ἐστὲ: ἔγὰρ ἔστι, ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἐνδὸν ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ ὑμέτερος δαίμων ἐστὶ, καὶ πῶς τὰ τοιαῦτα χρεῖα φωτὸς, εἰς τὸ βλέπειν τί ποιεῖτε;* *Arrian in Ep. l. i. c. 14.*

The Scripture is full of Testimonies to this purpose, *Psal. 90. 8. Thou hast set our Iniquities before thee, and our secret*

Vol. VI

*sins in the light of thy countenance; those sins which we commit in the Dark are in the Light of the Divine Knowledge, darkness and light are all one to him; Psal. 139. 11, 12. Jer. 16. 17, 23, 24. Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him?*

II. God knows the hearts and thoughts of Men, which implies these two things.

1<sup>st</sup>. His perfect Knowledge of them.

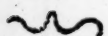
2<sup>ly</sup>. That this is his peculiar Prerogative.

1<sup>st</sup>. God perfectly knows the hearts of Men, *Jer. 17. 10. I the Lord search the hearts and try the reins; where by heart and reins, which are the most inward parts of the Body; and lie least open to discovery, are signified the most secret Thoughts and Motions of the Soul, these God is said to search and try, not as if it were a work of Labour and Difficulty to the Divine Knowledge to penetrate the hearts of Men, and to dive into their Thoughts, but to signifie to us the Perfection and Exactness of the Divine Knowledge; as when Men would know a thing exactly, they search into every part of it, and examine every thing narrowly;*

so

so God is said to *search the heart*, to signifie to us that he knows the hearts of Men, as throughly as we do any thing upon the strictest Search and most diligent Examination; upon the same account he is said elsewhere in Scripture to *weigh the Spirits of Men*, Prov. 16. 2. *All the ways of Man are clean in his own eyes, but the Lord weigheth the Spirits*; that is, he hath as perfect a Knowledge of the secret Motions and Inclinations of Mens hearts, as Men have of those things which they weigh in a Ballance with the greatest exactness.

Now that God hath this perfect Knowledge of Mens hearts, the Scripture frequently declares to us; that he knows the hearts of all Men, 1 Kings 8. 39. *For thou, even thou knowest the hearts of all the Children of Men.* 1 Chron. 28. 9. *The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.* How close and reserved soever Men may be, what disguise soever they may use to hide their purposes from Men, yet God sees them; the things which are most dark and secret are open to his view, Psal. 44. 21. *He knoweth the secrets of the hearts,*

 Prov. 15. 11. *Hell and Destruction are before him, how much more the hearts of the Children of Men?* Whatever pretences Men may make, God sees through them, and discovers the very intentions of their hearts. *Psal. 7. 9. The righteous Lord tryeth the hearts and reins.* Heb. 4. 13. It is said there of the Word of God, that it is a *discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the Heart; for all things are naked and open to the Eye of him with whom we have to do, and there is no Creature that is not manifest in his sight; nay he knows our thoughts at a distance, what they will be, before they actually are, Psal. 139. 2. Thou knowest my thoughts afar off.* 'Tis true indeed every Man is conscious to his own Thoughts, and privy to the Motions of his own Mind, when they are present, and when they are past, if he have not forgot them; but no Man knows what he shall think to-morrow, but this God knows, for he knows us more intimately and thoroughly than we do our selves; *God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things,* 1 John 3. 20.

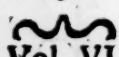
And tho' the Scripture had not revealed this so plainly, yet we had not been



been wholly ignorant of it ; it is a Principle implanted in us, and born with us, as being part of that natural Notion which Men have of God ; the Reason of our Minds tells us that God knows our Hearts ; and the Fears and Jealousies of our Minds are an Evidence of it.

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(1<sup>st</sup>.) The Reason of every Man's mind tells him, that the Supreme Being, whom we call God, is endowed with all Perfection, and among his other Perfections, that *he excels in Knowledge* ; and to the Perfection of Knowledge it is required, that it extend it self to all Objects, and that nothing be exempted from it. The Knowledge of God in respect of all Objects, is like the Sun, in respect of this lower World, *nothing is hid from the light of it*. We have naturally this Apprehension of God, that he is an immense Being, every where present, that he intimately penetrates all places and things, and consequently that he is present to our Spirits, and sees all the motions of our Minds, and discerns the very secrets of our Hearts ; and there can be no such thing as secrecie and retirement from an Eye that is eve-


 ry where, and a Knowledge that pier-  
Vol. VI. ceth into all things.

And to convince us that these are the dictates of Natural Reason, without the help and assistance of Divine Revelation, we shall find that the Heathen, who had only the advantage of Natural Light, were firmly possess'd with this apprehension, that God knows the hearts of Men. This may be sufficiently Collected from the frequent sayings of the wiser Heathens to this purpose; that the best and most acceptable worship of the Deity is that which is inward, that of the Heart and Mind. To this Sense Tully speaks, *Cultus autem deorum est optimus, idemque castissimus atque sanctissimus plenissimisque pietatis, ut eos semper purâ, integrâ atque incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur*, The best and holiest worship of the Gods is to worship them with a pure and upright and sincere Mind. To the same purpose is that known saying of the Poet,

*Compositum jus fasque animi, sanctosque recessus  
Mentis, & incoctum generoso pectus  
honesto,*

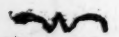
*Hæc*

*Hæc cedo ut admoveam templis & farre*  
*litabo;*

  
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Do but offer to God a mind inwardly resolved to be just and honest, and the plainest sacrifice will please him. Now from hence, that they judged the purity of our Hearts and Thoughts, and an honest disposition of Mind, to be most acceptable to their Gods, we may certainly conclude, that they did most firmly believe that God knows the Secrets of Mens Hearts; otherwise there had been no need for Men to endeavour to recommend themselves this way to the Divine acceptance.

But we need not argue this by consequence, there are many express passages in their Writings, which do sufficiently signify their belief of this Principle. *Thales*, one of their most ancient Philosophers, being askt, *if an unjust Man could conceal himself from God*, he answer'd, *he cannot so much as hide from him the very thoughts and design of it.* *Socrates* (as *Xenophon* tells us) was wont to inculcate this Principle upon his Scholar, that *the Gods know all things, what we say, and what we do, and what we think in silence.* To the same purpose *Arrian* in his *Dis-*  
 ferta-


 Vol. VI. *Discourses upon Epictetus laying down the Principles of a virtuous life, first of all, faith he, we must learn this, that there is a God who takes care of the World, and that there is nothing hid from him, not only what we do, but not so much as what we think, and design. So likewise Tully in his Book of Laws, let every Man be firmly perswaded of this, that the Gods see what every Man is, and with what Mind and Devotion they serve them: I will add but one Testimony more, and that is of Seneca in his Epistles, nihil Deo clausum est, interest animis nostris, & cogitationibus mediis intervenit, we can keep nothing close from God, for he is present to our Minds, and intimate to our Thoughts; so that you see this Principle is deeply rooted in the Minds of Men, and that Men do naturally Reason themselves into it.*

(2.) The natural fears of Men are likewise a secret acknowledgement of this; and I take this to be a great Truth, that a Man's natural Actions, and such as happen upon Surprise and without Deliberation, are a better argument of the intimate sense of our Minds, and do more truly discover what lies at the bottom of our Hearts, and what Notions are natural,

ral to us, than our contrived and deliberate Discourse. If I see a Man upon the sudden sight of a Serpent recoil and start back, tho' he tell me never so often that he is not afraid, yet I am sufficiently convinc'd of the contrary, because I see in his Countenance and Carriage a natural acknowledgment of Fear and Danger: so if Men find that upon the designing of a secret Wickedness, which never went further than their own Hearts, their Consciences do sting and lash them, that they have a sense of Guilt, and feel inward Frights and Horrors, whatever they may say to the contrary, this is a natural acknowledgment of an invisible Eye that sees them, and disallows their wicked Designs. If that be true which the Heathen Poet says, That

*Scelus intra se tacitum qui cogitat ullum,  
Facti crimen habet.*

*He that meditates any secret Wickedness in his Heart, is guilty to himself, as if he had committed it; this is a plain Confession, that the Man stands in Awe of something besides Himself, and is jealous that there is one that is Conscious to what he thinks.*

2. That



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2. That to have a perfect and thorough knowledge of Mens Hearts, is the peculiar Prerogative of God. This is imply'd in the Answer to that Question, *Who can know the heart of man?* Jer. 17. 10. *I the Lord search the heart, and try the reins*; this is the Prerogative of God, and one of his chief Titles, that he is *αγρδιονωσνς*, a knower of the heart, 1 King. 8. 39. *Thou, even thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men.* Men may make a probable conjecture at the Thoughts and Designs of others, from their Words and Actions; but God only knows them. Men are conscious to their own Thoughts and Purposes, *the spirit of a man that is in him, knows the things of a man*; but they cannot see into the Secrets of another Man's Mind; 'tis God alone that knows the Hearts of all Men. The Heart of Man is a priviledg'd place, and the secret and inward workings of it are not subject to the cognizance of any but God alone. The limits of Humane Knowledge are the outward appearances of Actions, 1 Sam. 16. 7. *The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart*; our Knowledge is but superficial, and glides upon the out-

side

side and surface of things, but the Divine Knowledge pierceth to the very center of every thing. Now the darkest place, the most inward retirement, the privatest Closet in the whole World, is the Heart of Man, and this God only is privy to; *Deus autor omnium & speculator omnium, à quo nihil secretum esse potest, tenebris interest, interest & cogitationibus nostris quasi alteris tenebris*, saith Min. Fælix, God made all things, and sees all things, and therefore nothing can be secret from him; he is present in Darknests, and he is present to the Thoughts of Men, which are as it were another and a thicker Darknests.

The Devil indeed pretends to this Knowledge; he would take upon him to know the integrity of Job's Heart better than God himself, and that notwithstanding the Testimony which God gave of his Integrity, yet if he were but soundly tried by Affliction, he would renounce God, and curse him to his face: but the event proved how groundless and malicious this suggestion was. But there is a far greater difficulty in this matter, from the passages of some Divines concerning the Devil's immediate access to the Minds of Men, and his

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his Power to cast in Wicked Thoughts into them ; which seems by consequence to grant him some knowledge of Mens Hearts ; for by the same Reason that he can imprint Thoughts upon Mens Minds, he may see those that are imprinted there.

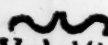
That the Devil is a very sagacious Spirit, and can make very shrewd Conjectures at the bent and inclinations of Mens Minds, and the probable workings of our Thoughts, from a general Knowledge and Observation of our Tempers and Passions, of our Interests and Designs, and from the general tenour of our Actions in Publick and Private, and from our Prayers and Confessions to God (if he permit him at any time to be so near Good Men) I think there is no doubt : but this is far from a Knowledge of our Hearts ; all this is but Conjecture, and such as men may make of one another in a lower degree.

But as to the business of casting in blasphemous and despairing Thoughts into the Minds of Men, to this I would say these *three* things.

1. That there are few of these cases which may not more probably be resolved

solved into the Wickedness and Infidelity of Mens Hearts, or into the Dark-ness and Melancholy of our tempers, which are apt to raise and suggest strange Thoughts to Men, and such as we may be apt to think have no rise from our selves, not considering what an odd and strange influence the disorder of our bodily Humours may have upon our Minds, as we see in violent Fevers, and several other Diseases; and *Melancholy*, tho' the workings of it are more still and quiet, is as truly a *Disease* as any other; so that I chuse rather to ascribe as much of these to a bodily Distemper as may be, because it is a very uncomfortable consideration, to think that the Devil hath such an immediate Power upon the Minds of Men.

2. I do not see how by any means it can be granted, without prejudice to this Prerogative of God, which the Scripture plainly gives him, of being *the only Knower of the Heart*, that the Devil can have so immediate an access to our Minds, as to put wicked Thoughts into them; nor can I think, that when it is said, 1 Chron. 21.1. That *Satan provoked David to number the people*, and Luke 22.3. That *the devil entred into Judas*, and

Vol. VI.  and Acts 5. 3. That *Satan had filled the heart of Ananias to lie unto the Holy Ghost*, and Eph. 2. 2. That *the devil is the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience*; I say I cannot think that any or all of these expressions do amount to such an immediate power of putting wicked Thoughts into Mens Minds, but they only signifie that the Devil hath a greater hand in some sins than others, and that a Heart wickedly bent and inclined give him a great advantage to tempt Men more powerfully, by presenting the occasions of such wicked Thoughts and Actions to them; for it is usual in Scripture-phrafe, as to ascribe all good Motions to God's Spirit, so all evil Thoughts and Actions to the Devil, not that he is the immediate Cause of them, but because he is always ready to tempt Men to them, and one way or other to promote them.

3. I see no Reason to grant (as many have done) an immediate Power to the Devil over the fancies and imaginations of Men, and that he may know the workings of them, tho' not the secret thoughts of Mens Minds; for this seems to me to be in effect to grant him  
the



the Knowledge of Mens Hearts, and to give him a Key to that Closet which God hath reserved to himself : for it is a very nice Distinction which is here made between the Thoughts of Mens Minds, and the Images of their Fancies ; and if these should happen to be but words that signifie the same thing, we shall unawares intrench upon the Prerogative of God. Therefore because the Scripture is a stranger to these nice and subtile distinctions between the Imaginations of the Fancy, and the Thoughts of the Heart, I think it is much safer to assert the Prerogative of God in that latitude that the Scripture useth the word, *heart*, for all the inward motions of the Mind, for the Thoughts and Intentions of the Heart, and roundly to affirm that all the inward motions of our Souls are totally exempt from the immediate cognizance of any other Spirit but God's alone ; and that neither Angel nor Devil hath any further Knowledge of them, than may be collected and inferr'd in a way of probable Conjecture from the particular Knowledge of Mens Tempers and Habits and Designs, and the Course of their Actions. I proceed to the

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III.

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III. Particular ; God's Knowledge of future Events. This God proposes as the way to discern the true God from Idols, *Isaiah 41. 21, &c. Produce your Cause, saith the Lord, bring forth your strong Reasons, saith the King of Jacob*, that is, let them bring some Argument that may convince us that they are Gods ; and he instanceth in foretelling future Events, *v. 22. Let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them ; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are Gods.* God puts it upon this issue, if they can foretel future things, then they are Gods ; if not, they are vanity, and a work of naught, and he is an abomination that chuseth them, *v. 24. By things to come, I understand such Effects as do not depend upon any necessary Cause, but upon the Will of Free Agents, and so may be, or may not be ; from whence it is plain, that it is the Prerogative of God, proper and peculiar to Him, to know future Events. And here I shall consider these two things.*

1. That

1. That God knows future Events

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2. That he only knows them.

1. God knows future Events; which will appear from the dictates of Natural Light, and from Scripture.

(1.) From the dictates of Natural Light, as it is a Perfection, and that which among Men is accounted the best part of Wisdom; and unless this did belong to God, how could he govern the World? The Heathens, except only the *Epicureans*, generally granted this, as appears in those wise Counsels, which we frequently meet with in them to this purpose, that we should not be anxious for the future, but having done our endeavour, leave the Events of things to God, who only knows them and disposeth them.

*Permittes ipsis expendere Numinibus,  
quid*

*Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris.* Juv.

And afterward saith he, *We are importunate with God for Wife and Children :*

L 2

At

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*At illis notum, qui pueri, qualisque futura sit uxor; and that this was their Opinion, appears yet more clearly from those apprehensions which they had of Divination. Tully lays down this for a Principle, Deos posse nobis signa futurarum reum ostendere; de Legibus, and in his Book de Divin. he tells us, that there was such a thing as Divination, for it was an old Opinion, jam usque ab Heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque Pop. Rom. & omnium gentium firmata consensu, and afterward that this Divination was not, sine instinctu afflatuque divino.*

I know they did variously explain this, according to their several Opinions about *Fate* and *Contingency*, and their Apprehensions about the *Providence* of God. One Sect of them, the *Stoicks*, held that there was a fatal Chain of Causes from first to last, and things did necessarily follow one another; and by this Means they made Fore-knowledge easie and explicable, and tho' in their Disputes they seem to grant no such thing as *Events* and *Contingencies*, yet they are agreed in the thing, that those things which we call *Events*, tho' they would not call

call them so, were Fore-known to God. And for this I shall only cite one Testimony of *Seneca*, speaking of God's Fore-knowledge of the most contingent things, the Dispositions of Men long before they are Born; he adds, *nota est enim illis operis sui series, omniumque illis rerum per manus suas iturarum scientia in aperto semper est; nobis ex abdito subit; & quæ repentina putamus, illis provisa veniunt & familiaria;* and how peremptory soever this Sect is in their disputes about *Fate*, yet when they speak of the τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῶν, and generally in their Moral Discourses, they seem plainly to me to exempt the will of Man from this fatal necessity.

And those other Sects of the Philosophers that denied *Fate*, did generally grant God's Fore-knowledge of contingent things. I grant indeed, that they did rather make God's Fore-knowledge an *Arbitrary* and *Voluntary* than a necessary Perfection, that is, that God, when he pleased to apply himself to it, could Fore-know all future Events: but their general Opinion was, that as his Providence did not extend to small and inconsiderable things, so nei-



Vol. VI. ther his Fore-knowledge. But Tully seems to attribute a very perfect Providence to him, and a Fore-knowledge of the least things, *Quis non timeat omnia providentem, cogitantem, animadvertentem, & omnia ad se pertinere putantem, curiosum & negotij plenum deum?* But I cannot say he is constant to himself: but they all agree in granting to him this Perfection of knowing all future things, if he pleased to trouble himself with it; and had they not in this mistaken the Nature of God, they might easily have apprehended, that 'tis no trouble nor weariness to an Infinite Understanding that is always in Act, to know the least things how many soever they be.

2. From Scripture, which gives us Testimonies and Arguments of it.

(1.) Testimonies *Isa. 48. 3, &c. Acts 15. 18. Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the World, ἀπ' αἰῶνος from everlasting;* which by the way I cannot but compare with the forecited place of *Sen. Nota enim illis operis sui series, &c.*

(2.) By Arguments from Scripture. I will mention but one; the clear and particular Predictions of future Events long before they happened. *Gen. 15. 13.*

God

God foretels the Children of *Israel's* deliverance after 430 Years, which he punctually accomplisht. *Exod.* 12. 40, 41. The Prophet that prophesied against the Altar at *Bethel* named the Man that should do it, *Josias*, 350 Years before-hand. *1 Kings* 13. 2. The deliverance of the Children of *Israel* from the *Babylonish* Captivity was foretold 100 Years before to be done particularly by *Cyrus*; which is so strange, that the Prophet brings it in with a Preface of God's Wisdom and Power, *Isa.* 44. 24, &c. Which was afterward precisely fulfilled, when the 70 Years were expired. How are the Life and Death of the *Messias*, with many particular Circumstances foretold? And did not he foretel the Destruction of *Jerusalem* 40 Years before?

But because there may be no contingency in good things, God himself may be resolved to effect them, or excite Men to do them, when he hath foretold them; you shall find that the worst things have been foretold; the Apostacy of the Children of *Israel*, *Deut.* 31. 16. and their Infidelity in times of the Gospel, *Isa.* 53. 1, 5, 9, 26. Our Saviour foretold the Treachery of *Ju-*

Vol. VI. *das*, and Peter's denial of him ; now these are so evil, that it were Blasphemy to suppose the Holy God to have any hand in them ; and therefore are foretold by him meerly by virtue of his *Fore-knowledge*, and the *infiniteness* of his *Understanding*, which reacheth things at the greatest distance, that are most contingent.

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## SERMON

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# SERMON VI.

## Of the Knowledge of God.

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I SAM. II. 3.

*The Lord is a God of Knowledge.*

**I** Have consider'd this Perfection of God, in some of the greatest and most difficult instances of it, his Knowledge of the most secret Things, the hearts of Men, and future Events; against the last of which there are some Objections, which I come now briefly to consider, and pass on to what remains.

*Objection the First; The impossibility of the thing.* Certainty of all Knowledge depends upon the certainty of the Object, therefore there cannot be a certain and determinate Knowledge of any thing, but what is certainly and determinately true; but future Events, which

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which may or may not be, have no certain and determinate Truth, that is, it is not certain either that they will or will not be, because they have no certain Cause, therefore there can be no infallible Knowledge concerning them.

*Answer,* This I confess is the grand Difficulty ; I shall not be so solicitous to take it away, as to give satisfaction to it.


1. I might say with a very fair Probability, that the certainty of Knowledge doth not depend upon the certainty of the *Cause*, but of the *Object*, which may be certain, tho' the *Cause* be contingent. Which I prove thus, whatever Event hath actually happened, as because now it is past, it is certainly true that *it was*, so because it once was, it was certainly true before it was, that *it would be*; as in *Peter's* denying of *Christ*. If it be now true that *he hath denied him*, it was true before, that *he would deny him*; and it being determinately true, God saw it *as it was*; so that here is an *Object* of a certain Knowledge.

2. Tho' we could not explain the possibility of God's knowing future Contingencies, much less the manner how; yet we are sufficiently assured that God doth  
know



know them. I will give but one instance for the Proof of this. Nothing more evident than the Sin of *Adam*; yet God fore-knew this; how else was Christ decreed before the Foundation of the World? Christ was a remedy upon the occasion of sin, now the remedy could not be designed before the sin was foreseen: and this being certain, *cum constat de re, frustra inquiritur de modo*, when we are certain of the thing, 'tis not necessary to know the manner. We are satisfied of many things, the manner whereof we do not know; we believe the union of the Soul and Body, tho' no Man can explain how a Spirit can be united to Matter; we believe the continuity of matter, that is, that the parts of it hang together, of which whosoever saith he can give an account, doth but betray his own ignorance. And so in many other things; that Man doth not know himself, nor the measure of his own understanding, nor the nature and obscurity of things, that will not confess himself posed in many things, that doth not acknowledge that there are many *ἀφάνεα*, many things the manner whereof is unimaginable, and of which our best Reason and Understanding can give no account.

3. 'Tis

  
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3. 'Tis very unreasonable to expect we should know all the ways which infinite Knowledge hath of knowing things. We have but finite Faculties and Measures, which bear no proportion to infinite Powers and Objects. Could we explain the manner how infinite Knowledge knows things, we should be *like God in Knowledge*, our understandings would be infinite like his ; and in this case especially it becomes us to put on the modesty of Creatures, and to remember that we are finite and limited. Some arrogant Spirits take it for an affront to their understandings, that any one should expect they should believe any thing, tho' they have the highest assurance of it, if they cannot explain the particular manner of it ; they make nothing to deny God's Knowledge of future Events, unless they may be satisfied of the particular way how he knows them:

I know there are those who undertake to explain the particular manner. Some say that God sees future Events *in speculo voluntatis* ; others say that the Eternity of God is actually commensurate to all Duration, as his Immen-

sity

fire to all Space, and so God doth not  
 so properly *fore-see* and *fore-know*, as  
*see* and *know* future things by the pre-  
 sentiality and coëxistence of all things  
 in Eternity; for they say that future  
 things are actually present and existing  
 to God, tho' not in *mensurâ propriâ*, yet  
 in *mensurâ alienâ*; the School-men have  
 much more of this Jargon and canting  
 Language; and I envy no Man the un-  
 derstanding these Phrases, but to me  
 they seem to signifie nothing, but to have  
 been words invented by idle and con-  
 ceited Men, which a great many ever  
 since, lest they should seem to be ignorant,  
 would seem to understand; but I won-  
 der most, that Men, when they have  
 amused and puzzled themselves and o-  
 thers with hard Words, should call  
 this *explaining* things.

The sum of the Answer is this; that  
 when we have done all we can, God's  
 fore-knowledge of future Events may  
 seem contradictory and impossible to  
 us; much less do I expect ever to be  
 able to give a particular account of  
 the manner of it: but we have suffi-  
 cient assurance of the thing, and unless  
 we had infinite understandings, it were  
 vanity to pretend to explain all the ways  
 of infinite Knowledge.

Secondly,

Vol. VI. *Secondly*, It is Objected, That if we can admit such a Knowledge in God as seems contradictory and impossible to our Reason, why may we not allow and frame such Notions of his Goodness and Justice?

To this I answer, There is a great difference between those Perfections of God which are imitable, and those which are not. Knowledge of future Events is a Perfection wherein we are not bound to be like God; and if we are assured of the thing, that he doth know them, it is not necessary that we should know the manner of it, and dis-intangle it from contradiction and impossibility; but it is otherwise in God's Goodness and Justice, which are imitable; he that imitates, endeavours to be like something that he knows, and we must have a clear Idea and Notion of that which we would bring our selves to the likeness of; these Perfections of God we are capable of knowing; and therefore the Knowledge of these Perfections is chiefly recommended to us in Scripture, *Jer. 9. 24.* By these God reveals himself, and declares his Name, and makes himself known to us, even by those Attributes which declare his Good-

Goodness, and Mercy, and Justice, *Exod.* 34. 6, 7. *Psal.* 86. 15. *Deut.* 32. 3, 4, 5. *Vol. VI.*

When God would give a Description of himself to *Moses*, he promises to cause his goodness to pass before him. So that it doth not follow, that because God's Knowledge of future Events is to be admitted, notwithstanding the seeming contradiction and impossibility of it, therefore we are to admit of any Notion of God's Justice or Goodness that seems contradictory or impossible. The

*Third*, Objection is made up of several inconveniencies that would follow from God's Knowledge of future Events.

1. It would Prejudice the Liberty of the Creature. For if God have an infallible Knowledge of what we will do, then we cannot but do what he infallibly foresees we will do; for otherwise his Knowledge would be fallible.

*Answer*, God's Fore-knowledge lays no necessity upon the Event. In every Event, we may consider the Effect *in it self*, or with relation to the Cause, and the manner how it comes to pass; consider'd *in it self*, it is future, with relation to its Causes it is contingent. God sees it as both, and so, as that which till it is



is, may be or not be ; and when it comes to pass, he sees the Man do it freely ; and so before it be done, it hath no necessity ; but upon supposition of foresight ; as *when it is*, it hath upon supposition *that it is*, as *Origen* excellently explains it. Fore-knowledge is not the cause of the things that are fore-known ; but because the thing is future and shall be, this is the Reason why it is fore-known ; for it doth not, because it was known, come to pass ; but because it was to come to pass, therefore it was fore-known ; and bare Knowledge is no more the Cause of any Event, which because it is known must infallibly be, than my seeing a Man run, is the Cause of his running, which, because I do see, is infallibly so.

2ly. If God infallibly fore-knows what Men will do, how can he be serious in his Exhortations to Repentance, in his Expectation of it, and his grieving for the Impenitency of Men ?

*Answer.* All these are founded in the liberty of our Actions. God exhorts to Repentance and expects it, because by his Grace we may do it ; he is said to grieve for our Impenitency, because we may do otherwise, and will not. Exhortations


hortations are not vain in themselves, but very proper to their end, tho' through our obstinacy and hardness they may be rendred vain to us and without effect. If the weight of the Objection lie upon *serious*, and you ask how God can exhort Men *seriously* to that which he fore-sees that they will not do, those whom he fore-knows will be finally impenitent? I answer, if his Exhortations were not *serious*, he could not foresee the final impenitency of Men. To foresee Mens final impenitency, is to foresee their willful contempt of Gods Warnings and Exhortations; and Rejection of his Grace; now Mens willful contempt of his Warnings and Exhortations cannot be foreseen, unless God foresee that his Exhortations are *serious* and in good earnest.

Having answer'd the Objections against God's fore-knowing future Events, I proceed to shew,

II. That God only knows future Events. *Ija. 44. 6, 7. Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer the Lord of Hosts, I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God: and who, as I, shall call, and shall declare*

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 Vol. VI. *it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient People, and the things that are coming, and shall come? let them shew unto them. Isa. 46. 9, 10. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none else. I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.*

The Reason is evident, because the Knowledge of future Events is beyond the reach of any finite understanding; especially if we grant it to be beyond our finite understanding, to explain the possibility of such a Knowledge; for to be sure that is out of the reach of our Knowledge, which we cannot so much as understand how it is possible it should be known by any Understanding.

But it may here be Objected; Did not the Oracles among the Heathens foretel several things, which Christians are satisfied came from the Devil? I have not time at present to examine the business of Heathen Oracles; I could easily shew there was much imposture in them: but grant they were really delivered

delivered and given out by a Spirit; yet the darkneſs and ambiguity, the affected and contrived ambiguity, is ſuch as ſhews that the Devil was conſcious to himſelf of the uncertainty of his Knowledge in thoſe matters; and thoſe few that came to paſs, and are in any tolerable Senſe ſaid to be accompliſht, were in ſuch matters, either wherein prudent Conjecture might go far (and I grant the Devil to be a ſagacious Spirit;) or elſe in diſ-junctive Caſes, as when there are but two ways for a thing to be, it muſt either be ſo, or ſo, in which a bold gueſſing may often hit right: but *gueſſing* at future things, is far from a *Knowledge* of them, which only can clearly be made out by punctual and particular Predictions of Things, with Circumſtances of Time and Perſon, ſuch as we find in Scripture in many inſtances, to the prediction of which, the greateſt ſagacity and the utmoſt gueſſing could do nothing, ſuch as thoſe Predictions of which I gave inſtances out of Scripture.

I have now done with the *Fiſt* general Head, I propos'd to be ſpoken to from theſe Words, *viz.* To prove that this

Attribute of Knowledge belongs to God.  
Vol. VI. I proceed to the,

*Second*, viz. To consider the Perfection and Prerogative of the Divine Knowledge, which I shall speak to in these following Particulars.

1. God's Knowledge is *Present* and *Actual*, his Eye is always open, and every thing is in the view of it. The Knowledge of the Creature is more *Power* than *Act*; it is not much that we are capable of knowing, but there is very little that we do actually know; 'tis but one thing that we can fix our Thoughts upon at once, and apply our Minds to; we can remove them to another Object, but then we must take off our Minds from the former, and quit the actual knowledge of it: but the knowledge of God is an actual and steady Comprehension of things, he being every where present, and all eye, nothing can escape his sight, but all Objects are at once in the view of the Divine Understanding. *Heb. 4. 13.* *Neither is there any Creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*

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2. God's Knowledge is an *intimate* and *thorough* Knowledge, whereby he knows the very Nature and Essence of things. The Knowledge which we have of things 'tis but in part, but outward and superficial; our Knowledge glides upon the superficies of things, but doth not penetrate into the intimate Nature of them, it seldom reacheth further than the skin and outward appearance of things; we do not know things in their realities, but as they appear and are represented to us with all their Masks and Disguises: but God knows things as they are. 1 Sam. 16. 7. *The Lord seeth not as Man seeth; for Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the Heart*; God knows things throughout, all that can be known of them. The quick and piercing Eye of God Penetrates into every thing, the light of the Divine Understanding lays all things open and naked, Heb. 4. 13. In which expression the Apostle alludes to the Sacrifices of Beasts, which were flead and cleft down the back bone, that the Priest might look into them, and see whether they were without blemish. To the Eye of our understandings most Objects are close, and have their

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~~~~~ Skins upon them: but to the Eyes of God all things are uncovered and dissected, and lie open to his view.

3. God's Knowledge is *clear* and *distinct*. Our Understandings in the knowledge of things are liable to great confusion; we are often deceived with the near likeness and resemblance of things, and mistake one thing for another; our Knowledge is but a twi-light, which doth not sufficiently separate and distinguish things from one another, we see things many times together and in a heap, and do but know them in gross; but there is no confusion in the Divine Understanding, *that* is a clear Light which separates and distinguisheth things of the greatest nearness and resemblance; God hath a particular Knowledge of the least things, *Luke 12. 7. Even the very hairs of your Head are all numbred*; those things which are of the least consideration, and have the greatest likeness to one another, *the very hairs of our Head*, are severally and distinctly known to God.

4. God's Knowledge is *certain* and *infallible*. We are subject to doubt and error in our understanding of things, every thing almost imposeth upon our Under-

Understandings, and tinctures our Minds, and makes us look on things otherwise than they are; our Temper and Complexion, our Education and Prejudice, our Interest and Advantage, our Humours and Distempers, these all misrepresent things, and darken our Minds, and seduce our Judgments, and betray us to Error and Mistake: but the Divine Understanding is a clear, fixt, constant, and undisturbed Light, a pure Mirrour that receives no stain from Affection, or Interest, or any other thing. Men are many times confident and apt to impose upon others, as if they were infallible: but this is the Prerogative of God, the Privilege of the Divine Understanding, that it is secure from all possibility of Errour; 'tis God only that cannot lie, Tit. 1. 2. because he cannot be deceived; the *infallibility* of God is the Foundation of his *veracity*.

5. The Knowledge of God is *easy* and *without difficulty*. We must dig deep for Knowledge, take a great deal of pains to know a little; we do not attain the Knowledge of things without search and study and great intention of Mind; we strive to comprehend some things, but they are so vast that

we cannot; other things are at such a distance, that our Understanding is too weak to discern them; other things are so little, and small, and nice, that our Understanding cannot lay hold of them, we cannot contract our Minds to such a Point as to fasten upon them: but the Understanding of God being infinite, there is nothing at a distance from it, nothing too great and vast for it's comprehension, nor is there any thing so little that it can escape his Knowledge and animadversion. The great Wisdom of *Solomon* is compared to *the Sand on the Sea shore*; the shore is vast, but the Sands are little (saith one) to signifie that the vast Mind of *Solomon* did comprehend the least things. 'Tis much more true of God, his Understanding is a vast comprehension of the least things, as well as the greatest; and all this God does without difficulty or pain; he knows all things without study, and his Understanding is in continual exercise without weariness. How many things are there which we cannot find out without search, without looking narrowly into, and bending our Minds to understand them? But all things are obvious to God, and lie open to his view.

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He is said indeed in Scripture *to search the Heart*, and *to try the Reins*, and *to weigh the Spirits*; but these Expressions do not signifie the *painfulness*, but the *perfection* of his Knowledge, that he knows those things as perfectly, as we can do any thing about which we use the greatest diligence and exactness.

6. The Knowledge of God is *universal*, and extends to *all Objects*. We know but a few things, our Ignorance is greater than our Knowledge, *maxima pars eorum quæ scimus, est minima pars eorum quæ nescimus*: but the Divine Understanding is vast and comprehensive, and by an imperious view commands all Objects; *he is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things*; he knows himself, and the excellency and perfection of his own Nature, and the secrets of his Will, 1 Cor. 2. 11. *The Spirit of God searcheth the deep things of God*; he knows all other things that are not, and all things that are, in all differences of time, their Powers and Qualities. The Knowledge of God is infinite, Psal. 147. 5. *His understanding is infinite*; he knows himself and his own Perfections, and all the possibilities of things,

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things, which are all infinite. Now the Understanding of God being infinite is incapable of any Addition, or Diminution, or Change. Our finite Understandings are liable to alterations, they may grow or decline: but the Knowledge of God is a full constant Light, 'tis always the same, not liable to any Eclipse, nor capable of any exaltation or improvement, but remains for ever the same.


Thirdly, I come now to draw some Inferences from the several parts of this Discourse.

I. From the Perfection of God's Knowledge.

1. The Perfection of the Divine Knowledge calls for our Veneration. Every Excellency commands Reverence, and raiseth our admiration, and none more than *Knowledge*, there is nothing that we value our selves or others more by, than this; the highest Knowledge of Man, the most glorious Understanding, that ever any one of the Sons of Men were endowed with, is, compared to the Knowledge of God, but as a glow-Worm to the Sun. If we admire these *Candles of the Lord*, which shine so imperfectly in the dark; if we reverence

rence a little Knowledge, compass'd about with ignorance; how should we admire *the Father of Lights, in whom is no darkness at all*, that Knowledge which hath nothing of blemish or imperfection in it!

2. We may hence learn Humility, and that on this double Account. As we have all our Knowledge from him; *what have we that we have not received?* And as our Knowledge is very imperfect, when compared with the Divine Understanding. We are blind and ignorant, 'tis but a few things that we are capable of knowing; and we know but a few of those things which our Natures are capable of knowing; and of those things we do know, our Knowledge is very imperfect, 'tis slight and superficial, attended with much difficulty and uncertainty in the attaining of it, and error and confusion in the use of it; the clearest Reason, and the brightest Understanding of Man hath many flaws and defects in it; so that the more we know of God, and of our selves, the more humble we shall be. It is *an empty Knowledge, and falsely so call'd*, that puffs up; as the empty ears of Corn are pert and raise up themselves, but those which are big and full, droop and hang down their

Vol. VI.  their Heads ; so 'tis only Ignorance that is proud and lifts Men up, but true Knowledge makes Men humble.

3. This is matter of Comfort and Encouragement. He knows our wants and weakness, and *will lay no more upon us than we are able to bear, for he considers that we are but Dust* ; he knows the rage and malice of our Enemies, and can when he pleases *put a Hook in their Nose, and his Briale in their Lips*, as he did to *Senacherib*, 2 Kings 19. 28.

1. From God's knowing our secret Actions, I infer

1. If God sees our most secret Actions, this discovers and confutes the secret Atheism of many. He that commits the most secret sin denies the Omniscience of God. Thus *David* describes the Atheism of some in his Days ; *he hath said in his heart, God hath forgot, he hideth his face, he will never see it ; the Lord shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it* ; and is not this, in effect, to deny God's Being ? for it is to deny him to be what he is. A Man may as well deny there is a Sun, as deny that it shines and enlightens the World.

There are some Relicks of this even in the best Men, which do at sometimes discover

discover themselves, *Psal. 73. 10, 11.* Therefore *his People return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them.* And they say, *how doth God know? is there knowledge in the most high?* that is, the People of God come to this, when they are come to an afflicted state, and see the Prosperity of Wicked Men, they come to this, to question the Providence of God, whether he takes knowledge of the Affairs of the World. But this Atheism reigns in wicked Men; while they live in their Sins, they live in the Denial of God's Omniscience; for did Men really believe that *God sees in secret*, that his Eye perceiveth the Dark-ness, and lays *open and naked* all things before it, how durst they Lie, and Steal, and Swear falsely? Vain Man! why dost thou seek Dark-ness and Retirement? how art thou alone, if thou believest that God is every where? how can'st thou retire from him? how canst thou shut him out? If thou believest that *he is Light*, what Security is Dark-ness to thee? if he look upon thee, who is the greatest and best Person in the World, who is thy Sovereign, thy Judge, thy Father, and thy Master, and thy best Friend (for we use to reverence
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Persons under these Notions and Relations, and to be ashamed to do any thing that is Vile and Unseemly before them) if he, who is all this, look upon thee, why art thou not ashamed? why does not thy Blood rise in thy Face? why should not Shame and Fear work, upon the apprehension of God's seeing us, as if men did behold us? for this, that God sees thee, is a greater Surprise and Discovery, and threatens thee with more Danger, than if the whole World stood by thee.

2. Live as those that believe this; be continually under the power of this Apprehension, That God takes a particular and exact notice of all thy Actions. The firm Belief of this would have a double influence upon us, it would encourage us in well-doing, and be a restraint upon us as to sin; *sic vivamus tanquam in conspectu vivamus, Sen.* It were well if Men would live as if any body saw them; but to live as if some Worthy and Excellent Person were always present with us, and did observe us, this will be a far greater curb upon us. There are some sins of that Ugliness and Deformity, that a Man would not commit them in the presence

presence of any one, of a Child or a Fool; and there are some Persons of such Worth and Reverence, *quorum interventu perdit quique homines vitia supprimerent.* Epicurus had this good Conceit of himself, that he could advise others so to act as if he stood by, *fac omnia tanquam spectet* Epicurus; but Seneca instanceth much better in Cato, or Scipio, or Lalius,

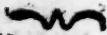
Ut sic tanquam illo spectante vivamus.

and shall not the presence of the Divine Majesty be an eternal restraint upon us?

This was David's course to keep himself from sin, *Psal. 39. 1. I will take heed to my way, while the wicked is before me;* how much more in the presence of God? *I have kept thy Precepts and thy Testimonies, for all my ways are before thee, Psal. 119. 168.* And it was wisely advised by Seneca, *That we should so live when we are among Men, as believing God sees us; and when there is none but he sees us, let us behave our selves before him, as if Men did stare upon us.*

III. God's Knowledge of the Heart teacheth us,

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1. The Folly of Hypocrisie; how vain it is to make a shew of that outwardly, which inwardly and in our Hearts we are not; to put on a Mask of Religion, and paint our selves beautifully without, when *inwardly we are full of rottenness and uncleanness*; to honour God with our lips, when our Hearts are far from him. If we were to deal with Men, this were not a very wise way, for there is danger of discovery even from them, therefore the best way for a Man to seem to be any thing, is really to be what he would appear; but having to deal with God, who *knows our thoughts afar off*, to whom all our Disguises are transparent, and all our little Arts of concealment signifie nothing, 'tis a madness to hide our Iniquity in our Bosom. With this Argument our Saviour convinceth the hypocritical Pharisees, *Luke 16. 15. Ye are they that justify your selves before Men; but God knoweth your Hearts.*

2. If God know your Hearts, then endeavour to approve your Hearts to him; charge your selves with inward Purity and Holiness, because of the pure Eyes which behold the most intimate and secret motions of your Souls; therefore

fore cleanse your Hearts from wickedness; how long shall vain thoughts lodge within you? Fear and Shame from Men lay a great restraint upon our outward Actions; but how licentious are we many times in our Hearts? what a strange freedom do we take within our own Breasts? This is an Argument of the secret Atheism that lies at the bottom of our Hearts. He that allows himself in any wicked Thoughts and Imaginations, which (out of a regard to Men) he will not put in practice, this man plainly declares, That he reve-
renceth Men more than God; that he either disbelieves a God, or despiseth him.

Therefore keep your Hearts with all diligence, because they are peculiarly under God's inspection; and when you are ready to take the liberty of your Thoughts, because no Eye sees you, ask your selves, *doth not he that pondereth the Heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it?* as the wise Man speaks, *Prov. 24. 12.*

And whatever you do in the service of God, *do it heartily as to the Lord.* Indeed if we did only worship God *to be seen of Men*, an external Worship would

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be sufficient: but Religion is not intended to please men, but God; he is a Spirit, and sees our Spirits, therefore we must worship him *in Spirit and in Truth.* 1 Thes. 2. 4. *Not as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our Hearts.* David useth this Argument to his Son Solomon, 1 Chron. 28. 9. *And thou, Solomon my Son, know thou the God of thy Father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.* Whatever liberty we may take to our selves now, and how careless soever we are of our Thoughts, and the inward frame of our Hearts; yet the Scripture assures us, that he, who now sees our Hearts, will one day judge us according to them. Jer. 17. 10. *I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every Man according to his ways.* And the Apostle speaks of a day coming wherein God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, Heb. 4. 13. Rev. 2. 23.

3. This is matter of encouragement to us in many cases. In our secret Troubles, Psal. 142. 3. *When my Spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.* In Cases of difficulty which depend

depend upon the Hearts of other men, which tho' we do not know, yet God knows them. So the Apostles, *Acts* 1.

24. when they did not know whom to chuse for an Apostle, they refer it to God, and *they prayed and said, thou Lord which knowest the hearts of all, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen.* But especially this is matter of comfort to us, when we suffer by the Calumnies and Reproaches of Men, when the World chargeth us with Crimes of Hypocrisie, and Falseness, and Insincerity, then to be able to appeal to the searcher of hearts, as to our Innocency and Sincerity, and to say with the Prophet *Jer.* O Lord of hosts, that tryest the righteous, and seeest the reins and the heart, unto thee have I opened my Cause, *Ch.* 20. 12. and with *St. Peter,* God which knoweth the hearts bare them witness, *Acts* 15. 8.

4. This renders all the deep and profound Policies of Wicked Men a vain thing. *The Lord knows the Thoughts of men that they are vanity,* *Psal.* 94. 11. They are *Vanity*, because he knows them, and can defeat them; he can bring their counsels to nought, and make their devices of none effect. He is conscious to the first motions of their Hearts; he

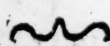
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sees those Cobwebs which they are spinning, and can blow them away with a Breath, he can snare them in their own Policies, and *turn their Counsels into foolishness*. Thou that puttest a Mask upon a wicked Design, and hidest the Malice and Revenge of thine Heart, under a dissembling Countenance, God sees thy Design, and hath a thousand ways to prevent it. When the Politicians of the World think they have laid their Design sure, with all imaginable caution, and that their Counsels cannot miscarry, being out of all possibility of Humane discovery or prevention, for all this *their counsels may come to nought*, and tho' *they have resolved it*, yet it may *not stand*; *he that sits in the heavens laughs at them, the Lord hath them in derision*. As Wise as they are, they are guilty of this over-sight, that they did not take God into consideration, by whom they are surprized and discovered. He that sees their Design can blast it in a moment; he can *speak the word*, and *thy breath shall go forth*, and *thou shalt return to thy dust*; and in that very day *thy thoughts perish*, Psal. 146. 4.

5. If God only knows the Hearts of Men, then *what art thou, O man! that judgest*

judgest another's heart? This condemns the Uncharitableness of Men, who take upon them to judge and censure Mens Hearts, which is *to speak evil of the things which they know not*; to meddle with things which do not fall under their cognizance. What St. James saith ch. 4. 12. *There is one law-giver, that is able to save and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another?* is proportionably true in this case; there is but *one that knows the heart*; who art thou then that judgest another Man's heart? Who art thou, O Man! that takest upon thee to sit in judgment upon thy Brother, and to pass Sentence upon his Heart, to pronounce him a Hypocrite, a wicked Man, and a damned Wretch? Art thou a *Man*, and *the son of Man*, and wilt thou assume to thy self the Prerogative of God? Man can only look to the *outward appearance*; but *God seeth the heart*.

There's nothing doth more palpably discover the Un-christian Spirit of that new Sect which is of late risen up among us, than their taking upon them to judge Men's Hearts, and as confidently to censure every Man they meet, as if they had a window into his Breast: But they are not alone guilty of this;

 those who are so ready to call Men
 Vol. VI. Hypocrites, they invade this Prerogative of God. We may pronounce an action wicked, if it be contrary to the Rule ; or a Man wicked, as to his present state, if the general course of his Life and Actions be wicked ; for our Saviour tells us, *by their Fruits ye shall know them* ; this we may do, provided we be called to it, and be sure it is so : but to call any Man an Hypocrite, who makes an outward profession of Religion, and whose external Conversation is unblameable ; this is to judge a Man in a matter of which thou canst have no Evidence ; this is *to ascend into Heaven, and step into the Throne of God, and to be like the most high* ; for he, even he only, *knows the hearts of the children of men.*

IV. From God's Knowledge of Future Events, we may learn,

1. The Vanity of Astrology, and all other Arts that pretend to foretell future Events, things that depend on the Will of Free Agents. The vanity of these Arts hath been sufficiently shewn by Learned Men, from the Weakness and Uncertainty of the Principles they rely upon ; I shall only for the

the present take notice, that it contradicts this Principle of Religion, that *God only knows future events*. From prudent Collections and Observations, probable Conjectures may be made of what will happen in some Cases; but there are no certain Prospective-Glasses, with which we can see Future Events, but Divine Revelation; therefore whoever takes upon him to foretell Future Events without Divine Revelation, he arrogates to himself that which is the Prerogative of the Deity; and God delights to chastise the Curiosity, and cross the Predictions of these vain Pretenders, *Isa. 44. 24, 25. Thus saith the Lord that formed thee, I am the Lord that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the Heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the Earth by my self: that frustrateth the tokens of the Lyars, and maketh Diviners mad; that turneth wise-men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish.* As he also in Scripture threatens those who consult them, and rely upon them. Those who go to Astrologers, or Wise Men, as they call them, to know their Fortunes, and enquire of the Events of their Life, they *forsake God, and betake themselves to lying vanities.*

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2. Refer future Things to God who only knows them, trust him with all Events ; *cast your care upon him.* When you have used your best Prudence, and Wisdom, and Diligence for your Supply and Security for the future, leave the rest to God, *for your Heavenly Father knoweth both your Wants and your Dangers.* When we are over-solicitous about future Things, we take God's proper Work out of his Hands, and usurp the Government of the World. Why do we *take too much upon us ? We are but of yesterday, and know not what will be to morrow.*

Mind your present Duty and Work, and leave Events to God. *Secret things belong to the Lord our God ; but those things that are revealed, to us and our Children for ever, to do all the words of his law, Deut. 29. 29. Do your Duty, commit the rest to God in well-doing.*

In this World we are in a mixt condition, which is made up of Good and Evil, of Happiness and Misery ; what is good for us to know, is revealed, that is our Duty ; but in great Wisdom and pity to Mankind, God hath concealed and hid the rest from us. He hath hid from us the Good that may happen

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to us, because the best things of this World are but shallow and empty, and if we could see them before-hand, we should prevent our selves in the enjoyment of them, and eat out the sweetness which is in them by delightful fore-thoughts of them. And he hath concealed future Evils from us, lest we should torment our selves with the fearful expectation of them, *Prudens, futuri temporis exitum,*

Caliginosâ Noctè premit Deus.

Ridetque si mortalis ultra fas trepidat.
What a folly is it to make your selves miserable with fear of being so; *ante miseras miser.* Use all wise means to prevent what you fear, and then be satisfied, and be as happy as you can 'till Misery come; go not forth to meet it, *sufficient for the day is the evil thereof;* do not anticipate the Evils of to morrow, and take present possession of an Evil to come; *cast your care upon him* who hath promised to *care for you.*

S E R-

SERMON VII.

The Wisdom, Glory, and Sovereignty of God.

JUDE 25.

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and Majesty, dominion and Power, now and ever.

I AM treating of the Attributes of God ; particularly of those which relate to the Divine Understanding, his *Knowledge* and *Wisdom*. The *Knowledge* of God only implies his bare Understanding of things, but his *Wisdom* implies the skill of ordering and disposing things to the best Ends and Purposes, the skill of making and governing and

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and administering all things in Number, Weight, and Measure. The *Knowledge* of God rather considers things absolutely, and in themselves: The *Wisdom* of God considers rather the Respects and Relations of Things, looks upon things under the Notion of Means, and Ends; accordingly I described them thus. The *Knowledge* of God is a Perfect comprehension of the Nature of all things, with all their Qualities, Powers, and Circumstances. The *Wisdom* of God is a perfect Comprehension of the Respects and Relations of things one to another; of their Harmony and Opposition, their fitness and unfitness to such and such Ends. I have largely spoken to the *First* of these; I come now to the

Second, The *Wisdom* of God in general; together with his *Majesty* and *Soveraignty*, as they are here joyned together. I begin with the

First, That *God is the only wise God*. In handling of this, I shall shew

1. In what sense God may be said to be the *only wise God*.
2. Prove that this Attribute belongs to God.

i. In what sense God may be said to be the only wise God. For answer to this, we may take Notice, that there are some Perfections of God that are *incommunicable* to the Creatures; as his *Independency* and *Eternity*. These God only possesseth, and they are to be attributed to him alone, God only is *independent* and *eternal*: But there are other Perfections which are *communicable*, that is, which the Creatures may in some measure and degree partake of, as *Knowledge*, and *Wisdom*, and *Goodness*, and *Justice*, and *Power*, and the like; yet these the Scriptures do peculiarly attribute to God, not that they are altogether *incommunicable* to the Creature, but that they belong to God in such a peculiar and Divine manner, as doth shut out the Creature from any claim or Title to them, in that degree and Perfection wherein God possesseth them. I shall give you some instances of this. His *goodness*, this is reserved to God alone, *Matth. 19. 17. Why callest thou me good? there is none good, but one, that is God: His power and immortality, 1 Tim. 6. 15, 16. Who is the blessed and only potentate; who only hath immortality:*

Vol. VI. *talit*y : His *Wisdom*, 1 Tim. 1. 17. The *only wise God* ; Rom. 16. 27. To God *only wise be Glory* : His *Holiness* Rev. 15. 14. *For thou only art Holy*. The transcendent degree and singularity of these Divine Perfections which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive ; so that altho' the Creatures partake of them, yet in that Degree and Perfection wherein God possesseth them, they are peculiar and proper to the Deity ; so that in this sense, *there is none good but God* ; he only is *holy*, he is *the only wise* ; in so inconceivable a manner doth God possess even those Perfections which in some degree he communicates, and we can only understand them as he communicates them, and not as he possesseth them ; so that when we consider of any of these Divine Perfections, we must not frame Notions of them, contrary to what they are in the Creature ; but we must say that the *Goodness* and *Wisdom* of God are all this which is in the Creature, and much more which I am not able to comprehend.

This being premised in general, God may be said to be *only wise* in these two respects.

1. As

1. As being Originally and Independently wise.

2. As being eminently and transcendently so.

1. God only is originally and independently wise. He derives it from none, and all derive it from him, Rom. 11. 33, 34. *O the depth of the riches both of the Wisdom and Knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his Judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his Counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever, Amen.*

He challengeth any Creature to come forth and say that they have given Wisdom, or any other Perfection to God; no, all Creatures that are Partakers of it, derive it from him. Prov.

2. 6. *For the Lord giveth Wisdom.* Eccl.

2. 26. *God giveth to a Man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.* Dan. 2. 21. *He giveth Wisdom to the Wise, and Knowledge to them that know Understanding.*

2. He is eminently and transcendently so. And this follows from the former; because God is the Fountain of Wisdom, therefore it is most
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eminently in him, *Psal. 94. 9, 10. He that planted the Ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the Eye, shall he not see? he that teacheth Man Knowledge, shall not he know?* In like manner we may Reason concerning all other Attributes of God, that if he communicate them, he is much more eminently possess'd of them himself; the greatest Wisdom of the Creatures is nothing in Opposition to the Wisdom of God, nothing in Comparison to it.

Nothing in Opposition to it; *Job 5. 13. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. Job 9. 4. He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength; who hath hardned himself against him, and prosper'd. Prov. 21. 30. There is no Wisdom, nor Understanding, nor Counsel, against the Lord. 1 Cor. 1. 19. He will destroy the Wisdom of the Wise; v. 29. and by foolish things confound the wise.*

Nothing in Comparison of it. There are a great many that pretend to Wisdom, but most are destitute of true Wisdom; and those who have it, they have it with many Imperfections and Disadvantages. Usually those who are destitute of true Wisdom pretend most to it, *Job 11. 12. Vain Man would be wise, tho' he be born like a wild Ass's colt.*

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The High and the Great of this World pretend to it, *Job* 32. 9. *Great Men are not always Wise*. Learned Men they pretend to it; the heathen Philosophers were great professors of Wisdom, *Rom.* 1. 22. *Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, they were wise to do evil, but to do good they had no understanding*, As the Prophet speaks, *Jer.* 4. 22. The Politicians of the World they pretend to it; but theirs is rather a *Craftiness* than a *Wisdom*; Men call it *Prudence*, but they are glad to use many Arts to set it off, and make it look like Wisdom; by Silence, and Secresie, and Formality, and affected Gravity, and Nods, and Gestures. The Scripture calls it *the Wisdom of this World*, *1 Cor.* 2. 6. and a *fleshly Wisdom*, *2 Cor.* 1. 12. 'Tis Wisdom misapply'd, 'tis the pursuit of a wrong End. The petty Plots and Designs of this World are far from Wisdom, *1 Cor.* 3. 20. *The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the Wise, that they are vain*. That cannot be Wisdom, which mistakes its great End, which minds mean Things, and neglects those which are of greatest Concernment to them. *Job* 22. 2. *He that is Wise is profitable to himself*. *Prov.* 9. 12. *If thou*

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be Wise, thou shalt be Wise for thy self. Tully tells us, Ennius was wont to say *Nequicquam sapere sapientem, qui sibi ipsi prodesse non quiret.* The wise Sages of the World as to the best things are Fools, Matt. 11. 25. God hath hid these things from the wise and prudent. There are many that are wise in their own Conceits, but there is more hope of a Fool than of them, Prov. 26. 12. So that the greatest part of that which passeth for Wisdom among Men is quite another thing. *Nihil tam valde vulgare quam nihil sapere;* we talk much of Prodigies, *maximum portentum vir sapiens,* Tul. Those few in the World that are the Children of true Wisdom, they have it in a very imperfect degree, they are not usually so wise for their Souls, and for Eternity, as Men of this World, Luke 16. 8. The Children of this World are in their Generation wiser than the Children of Light. It is attended with many inconveniencies, Eccl. 1. 18. in much wisdom there is much grief; he speaks of the wisdom about natural things.

But we need not instance in the folly of wicked Men, and worldly Men, and in the imperfect degrees of Wisdom which are to be found in good Men,

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in Wisdom's own Children; the Wisdom of God needs not these foils to set it off: the Wisdom of Man in Innocency, or of the highest Angel in Heaven, bears no proportion to the unerring and infinite Wisdom of God. We mortal men many times mistake our End out of Ignorance, apply unfit and improper Means for accomplishing good Ends; the Angels in Glory have not a perfect comprehension of the harmony and agreement of things, of the unfitness and opposition of them one to another: but the Divine Wisdom propounds to it self the highest and best Ends, and hath a perfect comprehension of the fitness and unfitness of all things one to another; so that Angels are but foolish Beings to God; *Job 4. 17. His Angels he chargeth with folly.* Job, upon a full enquiry after Wisdom, concludes that it belongs only to God, that he only is perfectly possessor of it, *Job 28. 12. &c. But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?* in such an eminent and transcendent Degree it is not to be met with in any of the Creatures; God only hath it, *v. 23. God knoweth the place thereof.*

II. I shall prove that this Perfection belongs to God, O 2 1. From

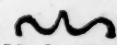
Vol. VI. Reason, and

2. From Scripture.

1. From the dictates of Natural Reason. I have often told you the Perfections of God are not to be proved by way of *demonstration*, because there is no Cause of them; but by way of *conviction*, by shewing the absurdity and inconvenience of the contrary.

The Contrary is an Imperfection, and argues many other Imperfections, therefore Wisdom belongs to God. Among men Folly is look'd upon as the greatest defect; it is accounted a greater Reproach and Disgrace, than Vice and Wickedness; it is of so ill a Report in the World, that there are not many but had rather be accounted Knaves than Fools; but in a true Esteem and Value of things, it is, next to Wickedness, the greatest Imperfection; and, on the contrary, Wisdom is the highest Perfection next to Holiness and Goodness; it is usually more cryed up in the World than any thing else. Reason tells us, tho' the Scripture had not said it, that *wisdom excells folly as much as light doth darkness*, Eccl. 2. 13. *The wisdom of a man makeith his Face*

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to shine, Eccl. 8. 1. *Wisdom is a defence*, 7. 
12. and v. 19. *Wisdom strengthneth the wise* Vol. VI.
more than ten mighty men that are in the City.

And the denial of this Perfection to God would argue many other Imperfections; it would be an universal Blemish to the Divine Nature, and would darken all his other Perfections. It would weaken the Power of God. How impotent and ineffectual would Power be without Wisdom! what irregular things would it produce! what untoward Combinations of Effects would there be, if Infinite Power should act without the Conduct and Direction of Infinite Wisdom! It would eclipse the Providence of God, and put out the Eyes that are in the *Wheels*, as the Prophet represents God's Providence. There can be no Counsel, no Fore-cast, no orderly Government of the World without Wisdom. The Goodness, and Mercy, and Justice, and Truth of God, could not shine with that lustre, were it not for his Wisdom which doth illustrate these with so much advantage.

I need not bring Testimonies from Heathen Writers to confirm this, their Books are full of Expressions of their admiration of God's wise Government

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of the World. I will not trouble you with Quotations of particular Testimonies. *Epicurus* indeed denyed that God either made or govern'd the World; but he must needs acknowledge him to have been a very wise Being, because he made him happy, which cannot be without Wisdom, tho' he had taken away all other evidence of his Wisdom. *Aristotle* seems to have supposed the World to be a necessary result and emanation from God: but then the other Sects of Philosophers did suppose the World to be the free Product of God's Goodness and Wisdom.

2. From Scripture; *Job. 9. 4. He is wise in heart; 36. 5. He is mighty in strength and wisdom. Dan. 2. 20. Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his.* Hither we may refer those Texts which attribute Wisdom of God in a singular and peculiar manner, *Rom. 16. 27.* and those which speak of God as the Fountain of it, who communicates and bestows it upon his Creatures, *Dan. 2. 21. James 1. 5.* and those Texts which speak of the Wisdom of God in the Creation of the World, *Psal. 104. 24. O Lord, how wonderful are thy works, in wisdom hast thou*

*thou made them all; Jer. 10. 12. who hath establisht the world by his wisdom, and stretch-
ed forth the heavens by his discretion; in the Providence and Government of the World, Dan. 2. 20. Wisdom and strength are his, and he changeth times and seasons, he removeth Kings and setteth up Kings; and in many other places; in the redemption of Mankind; therefore Christ is called the Wisdom of God, 1 Cor. 1. 24. and the dispensation of the Gospel, the hidden wisdom of God, and the manifold wisdom of God, Eph. 2. 10.*

If then God be *only wise*, the Original and only Fountain of it, from hence we learn,

First, To go to him for it. Jam. 1. 5. If any man lack wisdom, let him ask it of God. There are many conceited Men, that think they are Rich and increased, and stand in need of nothing. The Apostle doth not speak as if there were some that did not want Wisdom, but because there are some so proud and conceited, that they think that they lack nothing; those are stark Fools, and God resists such foolish and proud Men: but if any Man, sensible of his Defect and Imperfection, cometh to God, he gives liberally and upbraids no man. We

 are ashamed to learn Wisdom of Men, Vol. VI. lest they should contemn and upbraid us with our Folly; Men are envious and unwilling that others should be as wise as themselves: but God's goodness makes him willing to impart Wisdom, *he gives liberally, and upbraids no man.*

This is the most desirable Accomplishment and Perfection; *happy is the man that getteth wisdom; wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wisdom;* it is better than those things that are of highest value among men, as Solomon often makes the Comparison. Now because *it comes down from above,* we should look up for it; it's by the Revelation of his Will, and the wise Counsels of his Word, that we are made *wise unto salvation,* therefore we should beg of him, that *he would give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of himself,* Eph. 1. 17.

2. If God be *only Wise* in such an eminent and transcendent Degree, then let us be humble. There's no cause of *boasting,* seeing we have nothing but *what we have receiv'd.* The lowest instance, the least specimen of Divine Wisdom out-shines the highest pitch of Humane Wisdom; *the foolishness*

ness of God is wiser than men, 1 Cor. I. 25. therefore let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Jer. 9. 29. Of all things we should not be proud of Wisdom; the proud man throws down the Reputation of his Wisdom, by the way that he would raise it. No such evidence of our Folly, as as a conceit that we are Wise; *sapientis animus nunquam turgescit, nunquam tumet, Cic.* To pride ourselves in our own Wisdom, is the way to have our Folly made manifest. God threatens to destroy the wisdom of the wise man, and to turn their wisdom into foolishness.

3. We should labour to partake of the Wisdom of God, so far as it is communicable. The greatest Wisdom that we are capable of, is to distinguish between Good and Evil; *to be wise to that which is good,* as the Apostle speaks, Rom. 16. 19. that is, to provide for the future in time, to make provision for Eternity, to think of our latter end, to fear God and obey him, to be pure and peaceable, to receive instruction, and to win Souls; these are the Characters which the Scripture gives of Wisdom. When Job had declared that the excellency of the Divine Wisdom was

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was not to be attained by men; he tells us what that Wisdom is, which is proper for us; *And unto man he said, the fear of the Lord that is wisdom, and to depart from evil, that is understanding.* There are many that are wise to worldly Ends and Purposes, as our Saviour tells us, wise to get Riches, and to ascend to Honours: But this is not the wisdom which we are to labour after; this is but a short-witted Prudence, to serve a present turn, without any prospect to the future, without regard to the next World, and the Eternity which we are to live in; this is to be wise for a moment, and fools for ever.

4. If God be only Wise, then put your Trust and Confidence in him. Whom should we trust rather than Infinite Wisdom which manageth and directs Infinite Goodness and Power? In all Cases of difficulty trust him for direction, *acknowledge him in all thy ways, that he may direct thy steps, commit thy way unto the Lord, and lean not to thine own understanding. The race is not to the swift, nor the Battel to the strong, but the Providence of God disposeth all these things.* And if we rely upon our own Wisdom, that will prove a broken reed. And as

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our own Wisdom is a broken Reed, so the Wisdom of other men, *Isa. 31. 1, 2.* God curseth them that go down into Egypt, and trust to their strength and Wisdom, but look not to the holy one of Israel, neither seek the Lord; yet he also is wise, saith the Prophet.

5. Let us adore the Wisdom of God, and say with St. Paul, 1 Tim. 1. 17. *To the only wise God be honour and glory, for ever and ever Amen;* and with Daniel, *Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his.* Veneration is the acknowledgement of an Infinite Excellency and Perfection. We reverence any extraordinary degree of Wisdom in Men; but the Divine Wisdom which is Perfect and Infinite, is matter of our Adoration, and Blessing, and Praise. *Thanksgiving* respects the Benefits we receive: but we *bless* God when we acknowledge any Excellency; for as God's *Blessing* us is to do us good, so our *Blessing* him is to speak good of him; and as all God's Perfections are the Objects of our *Blessing*, so more especially his Wisdom is of our *Praise*; for to praise God is to take notice of the wise Design and Contrivance of his Goodness and Mercy towards us.

Before

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Before I pass on to the other Particulars contained in these words, I cannot but take notice that this *wise* God, here spoken of, is stiled *our Saviour*, which some understand of *our Saviour Jesus Christ*, and bring this place as an Argument to prove his Divinity; and if that were so, it were all one to my purpose, which is in the next place to shew that *Glory*, and *Majesty*, and *Dominion*, and *Power* belong to the Divine Being. But altho' I would not willingly part with any place that may fairly be brought for the proof of the Divinity of Christ, yet seeing there are so many plain Texts in Scripture for the proof of it, we have the less reason to stretch doubtful places; and that this is so, will appear to any one who considers that the Title of *Saviour* is several times in Scripture attributed to God the Father; besides that in a very Ancient and Authentick Copy, we find the words read somewhat otherwise, and so as to put this out of all Controversie, *μόνω θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν δια' Ἰησοῦ χριστοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα, &c.*

Having premised thus much for the clearing of these words, I shall briefly consider, *first* God's *Glory* and *Majesty*, and


and then his *Dominion* and *Soveraignty*.

First, God's *Glory* and *Majesty*. By *Majesty*, we may understand the greatness, or eminent excellency of the Divine Nature, which results from his Perfections, and whereby the Divine Nature is set and placed infinitely above all other Beings; I say the eminent excellency of the Divine Nature, which results from his Perfections, more especially from those great Perfections, his Goodness, and Wisdom, and Power, and Holiness.

And his *Glory* is a manifestation of this Excellency, and a just acknowledgment and due opinion of it. Hence it is, that in Scripture God is said to be *glorious in power*, and *glorious in holiness*, and his Goodness is call'd *his glory*; and here in the Text, *Glory* and *Majesty* are ascribed to him upon the account of his *Wisdom* and *Goodness*.

That these belong to God, I shall prove,

1. From the acknowledgment of Natural Light. The Heathens did constantly ascribe Greatness to God, and that as resulting chiefly from his Goodness, as appears by their frequent conjunction of these two Attributes, *Goodness*

 **ness and Greatness.** *Opt. Max.* were their most familiar Titles of the Deity; to which I will add that known place of *Seneca, primus deorum cultus est deos credere, dein reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine quâ nulla majestas.*

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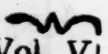
2. From Scripture. It were endless to produce all those Texts wherein Greatness and Glory are ascribed to God. I shall mention two or three. *Deut. 10. 17. the Lord is a great God; Psal. 24. 10. he's call'd the King of glory; 104, 1. he is said to be cloathed with majesty and honour. The whole Earth is full of his glory.* Hither belong all those Doxologies in the Old and New Testament, wherein Greatness and Glory and Majesty are ascribed to God.

From all which we may learn,

1. What it is that makes a Person great and glorious, and what is the way to Majesty, *viz. real worth and excellency*, and particularly that kind of excellency which Creatures are capable of in a very eminent degree, and that is *goodness*; this is that which advanceth a Person, and gives him a pre-eminency above all others; this casts a lustre upon a man, and *makes his face to shine.* *Aristotle* tells us, that *Honour* is nothing

nothing else but the *signification of the esteem which we have of a Person for his goodness*; for, saith he, *to be good, and to do good, is the highest glory.* God's Goodness is his highest Glory; and there is nothing so glorious in any Creature, as herein to be like God.

2. Let us give God the Glory which is due to his Name; *Ascribe ye greatness to our God,* Deut. 32. 3. *Give unto the Lord, O ye mighty, give unto the Lord glory and power,* Psal. 29. 1. The Glory and Majesty of God calls for our Esteem and Honour, our Fear and Reverence of him. Thus we should *glorifie God in our Spirits*, by an inward esteem and reverence of his Majesty. The thoughts of Earthly Majesty will compose us to reverence: how much more should the Apprehensions of the Divine Majesty strike an awe upon our Spirits in all our Addresses to him? *his excellency should make us afraid*, and keep us from all saucy boldness and familiarity with him. Reverence is an Acknowledgment of the distance which is between the Majesty of God and our meanness. And we should *glorifie him in our bodies*, with outward Worship and Adoration; that is, by all external significations of reverence

Vol. VI.  reverence and respect; and we should glorifie him in our Lives and Actions. The highest glory a Creature can give to God, is to endeavour to be like him; *satis illos coluit, quisquis imitatus est*, Sen. hereby we manifest and shew forth his Excellency to the World, when we endeavour to be conformed to the Divine Perfections. And in case of sin and provocation, we are to give glory to God by repentance, which is an acknowledgment of his Holiness, who hates sin; and of his Justice, which will punish it; and of the mercy of God, which is ready to pardon it; for it *is the glory of God to pass by a provocation*.

3. We should take heed of robbing God of his Glory, by giving it to any Creature, by ascribing those Titles, or that Worship to any Creature, which is due to God alone. This is the Reason which is given of the Second Commandment; *I the Lord am a jealous God; God is jealous of his Honour, and will not give his glory to another, nor his Praise to graven Images*, Isa. 42. 8. Upon this account, we find the Apostle reproves the Idolatry of the Heathens, because thereby they debased the esteem of God, and did shew they had unworthy thoughts
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of him, Rom. 1. 21, 23. When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations. And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things. Hereby they denied the glorious Excellency of the Divine Nature; that is, that he is a Spirit, and so incapable of being represented by any material or sensible Image.

Secondly, I come now to speak of the *Sovereignty and Dominion* of God. In which I shall shew,

First. What we are to understand by the *Sovereignty and Dominion* of God. By these we mean the full and absolute Right and Title and Authority which God hath to, and over all his Creatures, as his Creatures, and made by him. And this Right results from the Effects of that Goodness, and Power, and Wisdom whereby all things are and were made; from whence there doth accrew to God a *Sovereign Right* and Title to all his Creatures, and a full and absolute Authority over them; that is such a Right and Authority which doth not depend upon any Superior, nor is subject and accountable


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countable to any for any thing that he does to any of his Creatures. And this is that which is call'd *summum imperium*, because there is no power above it to check or control it, and therefore there can be none greater than this. And it is *absolute*, because all the Creatures have what they have from God, and all depend upon his Goodness, and therefore they owe all possible Duty and perpetual Subjection so long as they continue in Being, because it is solely by his Power and Goodness that they continue; and therefore whatever Right or Title any one can pretend to any Person or Thing, *that God hath to all things, in Deo omnes tituli omnia jura concurrunt.*

So that *Soveraignty* and *Dominion* signifies a full Right and Title and Propriety in all his Creatures, and an absolute Authority over them, to govern them and dispose of them, and deal with them in any way he pleaseth, that is not contrary to his essential Dignity and Perfection, or repugnant to the Natural State and Condition of the Creature.

And for our better understanding of this, and the preventing of Mistakes which Men are apt to fall into about the *Soveraignty* of God, I will shew,

I. Wherein

I. Wherein it doth not consist. 
And, Vol. VI.

II. Wherein it doth consist.

I. Wherein it doth not consist.

1. Not in a Right to gratifie and delight himself in the extreme Misery of innocent and undeserving Creatures; I say, not in a *right*; for the *right* that God hath in his Creatures is founded in the Benefits he hath conferred upon them, and the Obligation they have to him upon that account. Now there's none, who because he hath done a Benefit, can have, by vertue of *that*, a *right* to do a greater Evil than the Good which he hath done amounts to; and I think it next to madness, to doubt whether extreme and Eternal Misery be not a greater Evil, than simple Being is a Good. I know they call it *physical goodness*; but I do not understand how any thing is the better for being call'd by a hard Name. For what can there be that is *good* or *desirable* in *Being*, when it only serves to be a foundation of the greatest and most lasting *Misery*? and we may safely say, that the just God will never challenge more than an *equitable right*. God doth not claim any *such sovereignty* to himself, as to crush and oppress innocent Crea-

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tures without a cause, and to make them miserable without a provocation. And because it seems some have been very apt to entertain such groundless Jealousies and unworthy Thoughts of God, he hath given us his Oath to assure us of the contrary. *As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn and live.* So far is he from taking Pleasure in the misery and ruin of innocent Creatures, that in case of sin and provocation, he would be much rather pleased, if sinners would, by Repentance, avoid and escape his Justice, than that they should fall under it. The good God cannot be glorified or pleased in doing Evil to any, where Justice doth not require it; nothing is further from infinite Goodness than to rejoice in Evil. We account him a Tyrant and a Monster of Men, and of a devilish temper, that can do so; and we cannot do a greater Injury to the good God, than to paint him out after such a horrid and deformed manner.

2. The *sovereignty* of God doth not consist in imposing Laws upon his Creatures, which are impossible either to be understood or observed by them. For
this

this would not only be contrary to the dignity of the Divine Nature, but contradict the nature of a reasonable Creature, which, in reason, cannot be obliged by any Power to impossibilities.

3. The *soveraignty* of God doth not consist in a liberty to tempt Men to Evil, or by any inevitable Decree to necessitate them to sin, or effectually to procure the sins of Men, and to punish them for them. For as this would be contrary to the Holiness, and Justice, and Goodness of God; so to the nature of a reasonable Creature, who cannot be guilty or deserve Punishment for what it cannot help. And men cannot easily have a blacker thought of God, than to imagin that he hath, from all Eternity, carried on a secret Design to circumvent the greatest part of men into destruction, and underhand to draw Men into a Plot against Heaven, that by this unworthy practice he may raise a Revenue of glory to his Justice. There's no generous and good man, but would spit in that man's Face that should charge him with such a Design: and if they who are but very drops of goodness, in comparison of God, the infinite Ocean of Goodness, would take it

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for such a Reproach; shall we attribute *that* to the best Being in the World, which we would detest and abominate in our selves?

II. Wherein the *Sovereignty* of God doth consist.

1. In a right to dispose of, and deal with his Creatures in any way that doth not contradict the Essential Perfections of God, and the natural Condition of the Creature.

2. In a right to impose what Laws he pleaseth upon his Creatures, whether natural and reasonable; or positive, of Tryal of Obedience, provided they contradict not the Nature of God or of the Creature.

3. In a right to inflict due and deserved Punishment in case of provocation.

4. In a right to afflict any of his Creatures, so the Evil he inflicts be short of the Benefits he hath conferred on them; yea, and farther, in a right when he pleaseth to annihilate the Creature, and turn it out of Being, if it should so seem good to him, tho' that Creature have not offended him; because what he gave was his own, and he may without injury take it away again when he pleaseth. In these
the

the *Sovereignty* of God consists, and if there be any thing else that can be reconciled with the essential Perfections of God.

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Secondly, For the Proof and Confirmation of this. This is universally acknowledged by the Heathens, that God is the *Lord and Sovereign of the World, and of all Creatures*. Hence *Plato* calls him τῶν πάντων ἡγεμόνα; and *Tully*, *omnium rerum Dominum, Lord of all*; and this the Scripture doth every where attribute to him, calling him *Lord of all, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords*; to which we may refer all those *Doxologies*, in which *Power, and Dominion, and Authority* are ascribed to God. I will only mention that eminent Confession of *Nebuchadnezzar* a great King, who, when his Understanding came to him, was forced to acknowledge that *God was the most high*, Dan. 4. 34, 35. I infer,

First, Negatively, we cannot, from the *sovereignty* of God, infer a right to do any thing that is unsuitable to the Perfection of his Nature; and consequently that we are to rest satisfied with such a Notion of *Dominion and Sovereignty* in God, as doth not plainly

Vol. VI. and directly contradict all the Notions that we have of *Justice* and *Goodness*: nay it would be little less than a horrid and dreadful Blasphemy, to say that God can, out of his Sovereign Will and Pleasure, do any thing that contradicts the Nature of God, and the essential Perfections of the Deity; or to imagin that the Pleasure and Will of the Holy, and Just, and Good God is not always regulated and determined by the essential and indispensable Laws of Goodness, and Holiness, and Righteousness.

Secondly, Positively; we may infer from the *Sovereignty* and *Dominion* of God,

1. That we ought to own and acknowledge God for *our Lord* and *Sovereign*, who by creating us, and giving us all that we have, did create to himself a Right in us.

2. That we owe to him the utmost possibility of our Love, *to love him with all our hearts, and souls, and strength*; because the Souls that we have he gave us; and that we are in a capacity to love him, is his Gift; and when we render these to him, we do but give him of his own.

3. We

3. We owe to him all imaginable subjection, and observance, and obedience; and are with all diligence, to the utmost of our endeavours, to conform our selves to his Will, and to those Laws which he hath imposed upon us. Vol. VI.

4. In case of Offence and Disobedience, we are without murmuring, to submit to what he shall inflict upon us, *to accept of the punishment of our iniquity, and patiently to bear the indignation of the Lord, because we have sinned against him, who is our Lord and Sovereign.*

SERMON

3. We owe to him all imaginable
adoration, and obedience, and
grace, and are with all diligence, to the
attainment of our endeavours, to conform
our lives to his Will, and to those
Laws which he hath imposed upon us.
4. In acts of Justice and Discretion,
and we are without murmuring, to
submit to what he shall inflict upon us,
in respect of the punishment of our iniquities,
and patiently to bear the indignation of his
Love, because we have sinned against
him, who is our Lord and Sovereign.

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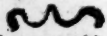
SERMON VIII.

The Wisdom of God, in the
Creation of the World.

PSALM 104. 24.

*O Lord; how manifold are thy Works! in
Wisdom hast thou made them all.*

I Am treating of the Attributes and Properties of God, particularly those which relate to the Divine Understanding, which I told you are his *Knowledge* and *Wisdom*. I have finisht the first, the *Knowledge* of God. The last Day I spake concerning the *Wisdom* of God in general; but there are *Three* eminent Arguments, and famous Instances of God's *Wisdom*, which I have reserved for a more large and particular handling. The *Wisdom* of God shines forth in the *Creation* of the World, in the *Government* of it, and in the *Redemption*


 tion of Mankind by Jesus Christ. Of these *Three* I shall speak severally.

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I begin with the *First*, the Argument of God's *Wisdom*, which the *Creation* doth furnish us withal. In this visible frame of the World which we behold with our Eyes, which way soever we look, we are encountred with ocular demonstrations of the *Wisdom* of God. What the Apostle saith of the *Power* of God is true likewise of his *Wisdom*, Rom. 1. 20. *The invisable things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and God-head: so the eternal wisdom of God is understood by the things which are made.* Now the *Creation* is an Argument of the *wisdom* of God, as it is an effect of admirable Counsel and Wisdom. As any curious Work, or rare Engine doth argue the Wit of the Artificer; so the variety, and order, and regularity, and fitness of the Works of God, argue the *infinite wisdom* of him who made them; a Work so beautiful and magnificent, such a stately Pile as Heaven and Earth is, so curious in the severall pieces of it, so harmonious in all its parts, every part so fitted to the service of the whole, and each part

part for the service of another ; is not this a plain Argument that there was *infinite wisdom* in the contrivance of this Frame ?

Now I shall endeavour to prove to you that this Frame of Things which we see with our Eyes, which we call the *World*, or the *Creation*, is contrived after the best manner, and hath upon it evident impressions of Counsel and Wisdom. I grant the *wisdom* of God is Infinite, and that many of the Ends and Designs of his *wisdom* are *unsearchable*, and *past finding out*, both in the Works of Creation and Providence ; and that tho' a *Wise man* seek to find out the work of God from the beginning to the end, he shall not be able to do it ; and we shall never be able to exhaust all the various Wisdom and Contrivance which is in the Works of God ; tho' the oftner and the nearer we meditate upon them, the more we shall see to admire in them ; the more we study this Book of the Creation, the more we shall be astonished at the Wisdom of the Author : but this doth not hinder but that we may discover something of the Wisdom of God, tho' it be Infinite. As the Effects of *Infinite Power* may fall under our Senses,

 *Senses*, so the Designs of *Infinite Wisdom* may fall under our *Reason* and *Understanding*; and when things appear to our best Reason, plainly to be order'd for the best, and the greatest advantages of the World and Mankind, so far as we are able to judge; and if they had been otherwise, as they might have been a hundred thousand ways, they would not have been so well; we ought to conclude, that things are thus, and not otherwise, is the result of *Wisdom*.

Now the Wisdom of God in the Creation will appear by considering the Works of God. Those who have studied Nature can discourse these things more exactly and particularly. It would require perfect skill in *Astronomy*, to declare the motions and order of Heavenly Bodies; and in *Anatomy*, to read Lectures of the rare contrivance of the Bodies of living Creatures. But this, as it is beyond my ability, so it would probably be above most of your Capacities; therefore I shall content my self with some general and more obvious instances of the Divine Wisdom, which shine forth so clear in his Works, that *he that runs may read it*.

1. I shall take a short survey of the several parts of the World.  Vol. VI.

2. Single out Man the Master-piece of the visible Creation.

1. If we survey the World, and travel over the several parts of it in our thoughts, we shall find that all things in it are made with the greatest exactness, ranged in the most beautiful order, and serve the wisest and best Ends.

If we look up to Heaven, and take notice only there of that which is most visible, the Sun; you see how by the wise order and constancy of its course it makes Day and Night, Winter and Summer. This the Psalmist takes notice of, *Psal. 19. 1, 2. The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy work. Day unto Day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.* It may easily be imagin'd many ways, how the Sun might have had another Course in reference to the Earth; but no Man can devise any other that should not be very much to the prejudice of the World; so that this being the best, it is an Argument that Wisdom had the ordering and disposing of it.

If

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Vol. VI. If we look down to the Earth, we shall see God's *ascending and descending*; I mean clear representations of Divine Wisdom in the Treasures that are hid in the Bowels of it, and those Fruits that grow upon the surface of it. What vast Heaps, and what variety of useful Materials and Minerals are scatter'd up and down in the Earth, as one would think, with a careless Hand, but yet so wisely dispers'd, as is most proper for the Necessities and Uses of several Countries! Look upon the surface of the Earth, and you shall find it cloath'd and adorned with Plants of a various and admirable Frame, and Beauty, and Usefulness. Look upon the vast Ocean, and there you may see the Wisdom of God in bridling and restraining that unruly Element, I mean in sinking it below the Earth; whereas the Water might have been above and cover'd the Earth, and then the Earth had been in a great measure useless, and incapable of those Inhabitants which now possess it.

Look again upon the Earth, and in the Air, and Sea, and you shall find all these inhabited and furnisht with great store of living Creatures of several kinds, wonderfully



wonderfully made in the frame of their Bodies, endowed with strong inclination to increase their kinds, and with a natural Affection and Care toward their Young ones ; and every kind of these Creatures armed either with strength or wit to oppose their Enemy, or swiftness to flee from him, or strong Holds to secure themselves. But the Creation is a vast Field, in which we may easily lose our selves. I shall therefore call home our wandering Thoughts ; for we need not go out of our selves for a proof of Divine Wisdom. I shall therefore,

2. Select the choicest piece of it, *Man*, who is the top and perfection of this visible World. What is said of the Elephant, or *Behemoth*, *Job* 40. 19. in respect of the vast bigness and strength of his Body, is only absolutely true of Man, that he is *divini opificii caput*, the chief of the ways of God, and upon Earth there is none like him. Man is *Mundi utriusque nexus*, the bond of both Worlds, as *Scaliger* calls him, in whom the World of Bodies, and the World of Spirits do meet, and unite; for in respect to his Body, he is related to this visible World, and is of the Earth; but in respect of his Soul, he is allied to Hea-

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ven, and descended from above. We have looked above us, and beneath us, and about us, upon the several representations of God's Wisdom, and the several parts of the Creation; but we have not yet consider'd the best piece of the visible World, which we may speak of, without flattery of our selves, and to the praise of our Maker. God, when he had made the World, *he made man after his own Image*. When he had finished the other part of the Creation, he was pleased to set up this Picture of himself in it, as a Memorial of the Workman. Now we shall a little more particularly consider this piece of God's Workmanship, being it is better known, and more familiar to us, as it is more excellent than the rest, and consequently a higher instance of the Divine Wisdom. It is observed by some, that concerning the parts of the Creation, God speaks the word, *let there be light, and let there be a firmament, and there was so*: but when he comes to make Man, he doth, as it were, deliberate, and enter into consultation about him; *And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let him have dominion*. Gen. i. 26; as if Man, above all the rest,

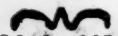
were

were the Effect and Result of Divine Wisdom, and the Creature of his Counsel. Vol. VI.

Man may be consider'd either in himself, and in respect of the Parts of which he consists, Soul and Body; or with relation to the Universe, and other parts of the Creation.

i. Consider him in himself, as compounded of Soul and Body. Consider Man in his outward and worse part, and you shall find *that* to be admirable, even to astonishment; in respect of which, the Psalmist cries out, *Psal. 139.*

14. *I am fearfully and wonderfully made, marvellous are thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.* The frame of our Bodies is so curiously wrought, and every part of it so full of Miracle, that *Galen* (who was otherwise backward enough to the Belief of a God) when he had anatomized Man's Body, and carefully survey'd the frame of it, viewed the fitness and usefulness of every part of it, and the many several intentions of every little Vein, and Bone, and Muscle, and the beauty of the whole; he fell into a pang of Devotion, and wrote a Hymn to his Creator. And those excellent Books of his, *de usu*


 Vol. VI. *partium, of the usefulness and convenient contrivance of every part of the Body, are a most exact demonstration of the Divine Wisdom, which appears in the make of our Body, of which Books, Gassendus saith, the whole work is writ with a kind of Enthusiasm. The Wisdom of God, in the frame of our Bodies, very much appears by a curious consideration of the several parts of it; but that requiring a very accurate skill in Anatomy, I chuse rather wholly to forbear it, than by my unskilfulness to be injurious to the Divine Wisdom.*

But this *domicilium corporis, this House of our Body*, tho' it be indeed a curious piece; yet it is nothing to the noble *Inhabitant* that dwells in it. This *Cabinet*, tho' it be exquisitely wrought, and very rich; yet it comes infinitely short in value of the *Jewel* that is hid and laid up in it. How does the glorious faculty of Reason and Understanding exalt us above the rest of the Creatures! Nature hath not made that particular Provision for Man, which it hath made for other Creatures, because it hath provided for him in general, in giving him a Mind and Reason. Man is not born cloathed, nor armed with any considerable

considerable Weapon for defence ; but he hath Reason and Understanding to provide these things for himself ; and this alone excells all the advantages of other Creatures ; he can keep himself warmer and safer, he can fore-see Dangers and provide against them ; he can provide Weapons that are better than Horns, and Teeth, and Paws, and by the advantage of his Reason, is too hard for all other Creatures, and can defend himself against their Violence.

If we consider the Mind of Man yet nearer, how many Arguments of Divinity are there in it ! That there should be at once in our Understandings distinct comprehensions of such variety of Objects ; that it should pass in its Thoughts from Heaven to Earth in a moment, and retain the memory of things past, and take a prospect of the future, and look forward as far as Eternity ! Because we are familiar to our selves, we cannot be strange and wonderful to our selves : But the great Miracle of the World is the Mind of Man, and the contrivance of it an Eminent Instance of God's Wisdom.

2. Consider Man with relation to the Universe, and you shall find the

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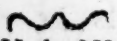
Wisdom of God doth appear, in that all things are made so useful for Man, who was design'd to be the chief Inhabitant of this visible World, the Guest whom God design'd principally to entertain in this House which he built. Not that we are to think, that God hath so made all things for Man, that he hath not made them at all for himself, and possibly for many other uses than we can imagine ; for we much over-value our selves, if we think them to be only for us ; and we diminish the Wisdom of God in restraining it to one end : but the chief and principal End of many things is the Use and Service of Man ; and in reference to this End, you shall find that God hath made abundant and wise Provision.

More particularly we will consider Man.

1. In his *natural* capacity, as a part of the World. How many things are there in the World for the service and pleasure, for the use and delight of Man, which, if Man were not in the World, would be of little use ? Man is by Nature a contemplative Creature, and God has furnish'd him with many Objects to exercise his Understanding upon,

upon, which would be so far useless and lost, if Man were not. Who should observe the Motions of the Stars, and the Courses of those Heavenly Bodies, and all the Wonders of Nature? Who should pry into the secret Virtues of Plants, and other natural things, if there were not, in the World, a Creature endowed with Reason and Understanding? Would the Beasts of the Field study Astronomy, or turn Chymists, and try Experiments in Nature?

What variety of beautiful Plants and Flowers is there! which can be imagin'd to be of little other use but for the Pleasure of Man. And if Man had not been, they would have lost their grace, and been trod down by the Beasts of the Field, without pity or observation; they would not have made them into Garlands and Nose-gays. How many sorts of Fruits are there which grow upon high Trees, out of the reach of Beasts! and indeed they take no Pleasure in them. What would all the vast bodies of Trees have served for, if Man had not been to build with them, and make Dwellings of them? Of what use would all the Mines of Metal have been, and of Coal, and the

Vol. VI.  Quarries of Stone? Would the Mole have admired the fine Gold? Would the Beasts of the Forest have built themselves Palaces, or would they have made Fires in their Dens?

2. Consider Man in his *Geographical Capacity*, as I may call it, in relation to his Habitation in this or that Climate, or Country. The Wisdom of God hath so order'd Things, that the Necessities of every Country are supplied one way or other. *Egypt* hath no Rains; but the River *Nilus* overflows it, and makes it fruitful. Under the Line, where there are excessive Heats, every day there are constant gales and breezes of cool Wind, to fan and refresh the scorched Inhabitants. The hotter Countries are furnisht with Materials for Silk, a light Cloathing; we that are cooler here in *England*, with materials for Cloth, a warmer Cloathing; *Russia* and *Muscovy*, which are extreme Cold, are provided with warm Furs, and Skins of Beasts.

3. Consider Man in his capacity of *Commerce* and *Entercourse*. Man is a *social Creature*; besides the advantages of *Commerce* with remoter Nations, for supplying every Country with those  
Con-

Conveniences and Commodities which each doth peculiarly afford. And here the Wisdom of God does plainly appear in disposing the Sea into several parts of the World, for the more speedy Commerce and Entercourse of several Nations. Now if every Country had brought forth all Commodities; *that* had been needless and superfluous, because they might have been had without Commerce; besides that the great encouragement of Entercourse among Nations, which is so agreeable to humane Nature, would have been taken away: If every Country had been, as now it is, destitute of many things other Countries have, and there had been no Sea to give an opportunity of Traffick; the World had been very defective as to the Use of Man. Now here appears the Wisdom of God, that the World, and all things in it, are contriv'd for the best.

Thus I have endeavour'd to do something toward the displaying of God's Wisdom in the workmanship of the World; altho' I am very sensible how much I have been master'd and oppress'd by the greatness and weight of so noble an Argument. For *who can declare the works*

works of God! and who can shew forth all  
Vol. VI. his praise!

The Use I shall make of what has been said, shall be in three Particulars.

1. This confutes the *Epicureans*, who impute the World, and this orderly and beautiful Frame of Things to Chance. Those things which are the proper Effects of Counsel, and bear the plain Impressions of Wisdom upon them, ought not to be attributed to Chance. What a madness is it to grant all things to be as well made, as if the wisest Agent upon Counsel and Design had contriv'd them; and yet to ascribe them to Chance? Now he that denies things to be so wisely framed, must pick holes in the Creation, and shew some fault and irregularity in the Frame of Things, which no Man ever yet pretended to do. Did ever any *Anatomist* pretend to shew how the Body of Man might have been better contriv'd, and fitter for the Uses of a Reasonable Creature than it is; or any *Astronomer* to rectifie the Course of the Sun. As for the Extravagant and Blasphemous Speech of *Alphonsus*, That if he had stood at God's Elbow when he made the World, he could have told him how to have made it better; besides his

Pride,



Pride, it shews nothing but his Ignorance; that he built his *Astronomy* upon a false Hypothesis, as is generally believed now by the Learned in that Science; and no wonder he found fault with the World, when he mistook the Frame of it: But those who have been most vers'd in Nature, and have most pried into the secrets of it, have most admired the workmanship both of the great World, and the less.

But if we must suppose the World to be as well made as Wisdom could contrive it, which is generally granted; it is a monstrous folly to impute it to Chance. A man might better say, *Archimedes* did not make any of his Engines by Skill, but by Chance; and might more easily maintain that Cardinal *Richlieu* did not manage Affairs by any Arts or Policies, but they fell out by meer Chance. What pitiful shifts is *Epicurus* put to, when the best Account he can give of the World, is this; *That Matter always was, and the parts of it in motion, and after a great many Tryals, the parts of Matter at length hamper'd themselves in this fortunate order wherein they now are; that men, at first, grew out of the Earth, were nourish'd by the Navel-string,*

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*string, and when they were strong enough, broke loose and weaned themselves; that the Nostrils were made by the Waters making themselves a passage out of the Body; and the Stomack and Bowels by the Waters forcing a passage downward; that the Members of the Body were not made for those Uses for which they serve, but chanced to be so, and the uses afterwards found out. Is it worth the while to advance such senseless Opinions as these, to deny the Wisdom of God? Is it not much easier, and more reasonable to say, that the Wisdom of God made all these things, than to trouble our selves to imagin how all things should happen thus conveniently by Chance? Did you ever know any great work, in which there was variety of parts, and an orderly disposition of them required, done by Chance, and without the direction of Wisdom and Counsel? How long time might a Man take to jumble a set of four and twenty Letters together, before they would fall out to be an exact Poem; yea, or make a Book of tolerable Sense, tho' but in Prose? How long might a Man sprinkle Oil and Colours upon Canvas, with a careless Hand, before this would produce the exact Picture of a Man? And*

is a Man easilier made by Chance, than his Picture? He that tells me that this great and curious frame of the World was made by Chance, I could much more believe him, if he should tell me that *Henry* the VII's Chappel, in *Westminster*, was not built by any mortal man, but the Stones did grow in those forms into which they seem to us to be cut and graven; that the Stones; and Timber, and Iron, and Brass, and all the other Materials, came thither by Chance, and upon a day met all happily together, and put themselves into that delicate order, in which we see them so close compacted, that it must be a great Chance that parts them again. Now is it not much easier to imagin how a skilful Workman should raise a Building, than how Timber, and Stones, and how that variety of Materials which is required to a great and stately Building, should meet together all of a just bigness, and exactly fitted, and by chance take their places, and range themselves into that order. I insist the longer upon this, because I am sensible how much Atheism hath gained in this Age.

2. Let


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2. Let us Admire, and Adore, and Praise the *Wisdom* of God, who hath established the world by his wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by his understanding; who hath made all things in number, weight, and measure, that is, by exact wisdom. The wise Works of God are the proper Object of our praise; and this is a day proper for this Work of Praise and Thanks-giving. Now under the Gospel, since Christ was clearly revealed, we have new matter of Praise and Thanksgiving; but as God has given us *Christ*, so he hath given us our *Beings*. We are not so to remember our *Redeemer*, as to forget our *Creator*. The Goodness, and Power, and Wisdom of God, which appears in the Creation of the World, ought still to be matter of Admiration and Praise to Christians. It is a great Fault and Neglect among Christians, that they are not more taken up with the Works of God, and the Contemplation of the Wisdom which shines forth in them. We are apt enough to admire other things, little Toys; but we overlook this vast curious Engine of the World, and the great Artificer of all things. It was truly said of one, that most men

men are so stupid and inconsiderate, as to admire the Works of a Painter or a Carver, more than the Works of God. There are many that have bestowed more Eloquence in the Praise of a curious Picture, or an exact Building, than ever they did upon this noble and exquisite frame of the World, or any of the works of God. We can admire the wisdom, and design, and skill of petty Artists, and little Engineers; but *here is wisdom in the Beauty and Order of the Creation.* Did we love God, and take pleasure in the Effects of his Wisdom and Power, we should be more in the Contemplation of them. *Psal. 111. 2. The works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein.* Let us then say with the Psalmist, ; O Lord, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom hast thou made them all ; the Earth is full of thy riches, &c.

More particularly let us, with an humble thankfulness, admire the Wisdom which hath made and disposed all things so fitly for our Use and Service, and with so merciful a respect to us; The Light and Influence of Heaven;  
the



Vol. VI  the Beasts and the Fruits of the Earth. We find the Psalmist often praising God upon this Account, *Psal.* 136. 4, 5. &c. The Wisdom which hath framed these Bodies of ours. *Psal.* 139. 14, 15, 16. Which hath endowed us with Knowledge and Understanding. *Elihu* complains, that Men were apt to over-look these great Blessings of God, *Job* 35. 10, 11, 12. *But none saith, where is God my maker, who giveth Songs in the night? Who teacheth us more than the Beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the Fowls of Heaven? There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men.*

3. Use; Trust the Wisdom of God, which made the World, to govern it, and the Affairs of it; and the Wisdom which hath framed thy Body in so curious and exquisite a manner, and formed thy Spirit within thee, and hath made so many Creatures, with reference to thy Necessity and Comfort, trust him for thy future Provision. *Mat.* 6. 25. *I say unto you, Take no thought for your lives, what ye shall eat, &c. Is not the life more than meat? and the body than rayment? He hath given us our Souls,*

Souls, he hath breathed into us the breath of life, and made these Bodies without our care and thought; He hath done the greater, will he not do the less? When thou art ready anxiously and solicitously to say, what shall I do for the necessaries of Life? Consider whence thou didst receive thy Life, who made this Body of thine; thou mayst be assur'd that the Wisdom which hath created these, consider'd how to supply them; the Wisdom of God knew that you would want all these, and hath accordingly provided for them, therefore *fear not.*

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# SERMON VIII.

The Wisdom of God, in his  
Providence.

Preached at *Kensington*.

I PETER V. 7.

*Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.*

**A**MONGST the several Duties, which towards the conclusion of this Epistle the Apostle exhorts Christians to, this is one, not to be over-much solicitous and concerned about what may befall us, but to refer our selves to the providence of God, which takes care of us. In speaking to this Argument, I shall

I. Consider the nature of the Duty here required, which is *to cast our care upon God*.

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II. The

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II. The Argument used to perswade us to it; because *he careth for us.*

I. For the nature of the Duty here required. The word *μέριμνα* signifies an *anxious care* about Events; a care that is accompanied with trouble and disquiet of Mind about what may befall us; about the good that we hope for, and desire; or about the Evil which we fear may come upon us. This the Apostle exhorts us to throw off; and to leave to the Providence of God and his Care, all those Events which we are apt to be so solicitous and disquieted about. The Expression seems to be taken out of *Psal. 55. 22. cast thy burthen upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.*

Now that we may not mistake our Duty in this matter, I shall shew what is not here meant by *casting all our care upon God*, and then what is meant by it.

The Apostle doth not hereby intend to take Men off from a *provident care and diligence*, about the concernments of this life; this is not only contrary to Reason, but to many exprefs Precepts and Passages of Scripture, wherein Diligence is recommended to us, and the Blessing




Blessing of God, and the good Success of our Affairs promised thereto; wherein we are commanded to provide for those of our Family, which cannot be done without some sort of care; and wherein Sloathfulness and Negligence are condemned, and threatned with Poverty; so that this is not *to cast our care upon God*, to take no care of our selves, to use no diligence and endeavour for the obtaining of the Good which we desire, and the prevention of the Evil we fear; this is to tempt the Providence of God, and to cast that Burthen upon him, which he expects we should bear our selves.

But by *casting our care upon God*, the Apostle intends these *two* things.

1. That after all prudent Care and Diligence have been used by us, we should not be *farther solicitous*, nor trouble our selves about the event of Things, which, when we have done all we can, will be out of our power. And this certainly is our Saviour's meaning, when he bids us, *take no care for the morrow*. When we have done what is fit for us for the present to do, we should not disquiet and torment our selves about the Issue and Event of Things.

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2. Cast-

Vol. VI.  2. *Casting our care upon God*, implies, that we should refer the issue of Things to his Providence, which is continually vigilant over us, and knows how to dispose all things to the best, entirely confiding in his Wisdom and Goodness, that he will order all things for our good, and in that confidence, resolving to rest satisfied and contented with the disposals of his Providence, whatever they be.

You see then the nature of the Duty which the Apostle here exhorts to, *viz.* That after all prudent Care and Diligence have been used on our parts, we should not be disquieted in our Minds about the event of things, but leave them to God, who hath the Care of us and of all our Concernments. Which is the

II. Thing I proposed to speak to, and which I intend chiefly to insist upon, *viz.* The Argument which the Apostle here useth to perswade us to this Duty, of *casting all our care upon God*; because *it is he that careth for us*; and this implies in it these two things.

1. In general, That the Providence of God governs the World, and concerns it self in the Affairs of Men, and disposeth of all Events that happen to us.

2. More


2. More particularly, That this Providence is peculiarly concerned for good Men, and that he takes a special care of them and their Concerns; *He careth for you.* The Apostle speaks this to them, not only as *Men*, but as *Christians*. And thus the Psalmist, from whom these words seem to be taken, does apply and limit this Promise; *Cast thy burthen upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.*

1. That God taketh care of us, implies in general, That the Providence of God governs the World, and concerns it self in the Affairs of Men, and disposeth of all Events that happen to us. I shall not now enter upon a large Proof of *the Providence of God*; that is too large and intricate an Argument for a short Discourse, and hath a great deal of nicety and difficulty in it; and tho' it be a fundamental Principle of Religion, and hath been almost generally entertained and believed by Mankind, and that upon very good Reason; yet because the vindication of many particular appearances of Providence, does in a great measure depend upon a full view and comprehension of the

Vol. VI. whole design, therefore we must necessarily refer our selves, for full satisfaction, as to several difficulties and Objections, to the other World, when we shall see God's works, together with the relation of every part to the whole design, and then many particular Passages, which may now seem odd and crooked, as we look upon them by themselves, will in Relation to the whole, appear to have a great deal of Reason and Regularity in them.


Therefore I shall at present only briefly, and in the general, shew that it is very credible, that there is a wise Providence, that governs the World, and interests it self in the affairs of Men, and disposeth of all Events which happen to us.

And I desire it may be observed in the entrance upon this Argument, that the handling of this Question concerning *Providence*, doth suppose *the Being of God*, and that *he made the World*, as Principles already known and granted, before we come to dispute of his *Providence*; for it would be in vain, to argue about the *Providence of God*, with those who question his *Being*, and whe-

whether *the World was made by him*: But  Vol. VI  
supposing these two Principles, *that God is, and that he made the World*, it is very credible, that he should *take care of the Government of it*, and especially of one of the noblest Parts of it, the race of *Mankind*. For we cannot believe, that he who employed so much Power and Wisdom, in the raising of this great and magnificent Pile, and furnishing every part of it with such variety of Creatures, so exquisitely and so wisely fitted for the use and service of one another, should so soon as he had perfected it, forsake his own Workmanship, and take no farther care of it; Especially considering that it is no trouble and disquiet to him, either to take notice of what is done here below, or to interpose for the regulating of any Disorders that may happen; for Infinite Knowledge, and Wisdom, and Power can do this with all imaginable ease, knows all things, and can do all things, without any disturbance of its own happiness.

And this hath always been the common Apprehension of Mankind, that God knows all things, and observes every thing that is done in the World,  
and



 and when he pleaseth, interposes in the  
 Vol. VI. affairs of it. 'Tis true indeed the Epicu-  
*reans* did deny that God either made  
 the World, or governs it; and there-  
 fore wise Men always doubted whe-  
 ther they did indeed believe the Being  
 of God, or not; but being unwilling  
 to incur the danger of so odious an Opi-  
 nion, they were content for fashion's  
 sake, to own his Being, provided they  
 might take away the best and most  
 substantial Arguments for the proof of  
 it. The rest of the Philosophers owned  
 a Providence, at least a general Provi-  
 dence, that took care of great and  
 more important Matters, but did not  
 descend to a constant and particular  
 care of every Person, and every little  
 Event belonging to them. *Interdum ca-  
 riosus singulorum,* says Tully; now and  
 then, when he pleases, he takes care of par-  
 ticular Persons, and their lesser concern-  
 ments; but many of them thought, that  
 God did generally neglect the smaller  
 and more inconsiderable affairs of the  
 World, *Dii minora negligunt, neque agellorum  
 singulorum & viticulas persequuntur,* The  
 Gods overlook smaller matters, and do  
 not mind every Mans little Field and Vine.  
 Such imperfect apprehensions had they

of the Providence of God. And tho' they would seem hereby to consult the Dig-  
nity and ease of the Deity, by exempt-  
ing him from the care and trouble of  
lesser Matters, yet in truth and reality,  
they cast a dishonourable reflection up-  
on him, as if it were a burthen to Infi-  
nite Knowledge, and Power, and Good-  
ness, to take care of every thing.

But now Divine Revelation hath put  
this matter out of doubt, by assuring us  
of God's particular care of all Persons  
and Events. Our Saviour tells us, that  
God's Providence extends to the least  
and most inconsiderable Creatures, *to*  
*the grass of the Field, which to day is, and*  
*to morrow is cast into the Oven, Mat. 6.*  
*30. To the fowls of the air, and that to*  
*the least of them, even to the Sparrows,*  
*two of which are sold for a Farthing, and*  
*yet not one of them falleth to the ground*  
*without God, Mat. 10. 29.* Much more  
doth the Providence of God extend to  
Men, which are Creatures far more con-  
siderable, and to the very least thing  
that belongs to us, *to the very hairs*  
*of our head, which are all numbered,* the  
lowest instance that can be thought  
on.

So

  
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So that the light of Nature owns a more *general Providence*; and Divine Revelation hath rectified those imperfect apprehensions which Men had about it, and hath satisfied us, that it extends it self to *all particulars*, and even to the least things and most inconsiderable. And this is no ways incredible, considering the Infinite Perfection of the Divine Nature, in respect of which, God can with as much and greater ease, take care of every thing, than we can do of any one thing; and the belief of this is the great foundation of Religion. Men therefore pray to God for the good they want, and to be freed from the evils they fear, because they believe that he always regards and hears them. Men therefore make Conscience of their Duty, because they believe God observes them, and will reward and punish their good and evil Deeds. So that take away the Providence of God, and we pull down one of the main Pillars upon which Religion stands, we rob our selves of one of the greatest Comforts and best Refuges in the Afflictions, and Calamities of this life, and of all our hopes of happiness in the next.

And

And tho' there be many disorders in the World, especially in the Affairs of Men, the most irregular and intractable Piece of God's Creation ; yet this is far from being a sufficient Objecti- on against the *Providence of God*, if we consider, that God made Man a free Creature, and capable of abusing his Liberty, and intends this present life for a state of trial in order to another, where Men shall receive the just recompence of their Actions here : And then if we consider, that many of the evils and disorders, which God permits to happen, are capable of being over- ruled by him to a greater good, and are made many times to serve wise and excellent purposes, and that the Providence of God does sometimes vi- sibly and remarkably interpose, for the prevention and remedy of great Disor- ders and Confusions ; I say considering all this, it is no blemish to the Divine Providence, to permit many of those Irregularities which are in the World, and suffer the Fates of good and bad Men to be so cross and unequal in this life. For supposing another life after this, wherein Men shall come to an Account, and every Man shall receive the

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the just recompence of his Actions, there will then be a proper Season and full Opportunity, of setting all things straight, and no Man shall have reason then, either to glory in his wickedness, or to complain of his sufferings in this World. This is the *first*, that God's Providence governs the World, and interests it self in the affairs of Men, and disposeth of all Events that happens to them; and this is a very good Reason, why we should *cast* our particular cares upon him, who hath undertaken the Government of the whole.

2. The Providence of God is more peculiarly concerned for good Men, and he takes a more particular and especial care of them. The Apostle speaks this to Christians, *cast all your care on him, for he careth for you*. And this David limits in a more peculiar manner to good Men; *cast thy burthen upon the Lord, and he will sustain thee, he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved*.


The Providence of God many times preserves good Men from those Evils which happen to others, and by a peculiar and remarkable interposition, rescues them out of those Calamities which it suffers others to fall into; and



and God many times bleſſeth good Men, with remarkable proſperity and ſucceſs in their Affairs. To which purpoſe there are innumerable Declarations and Promiſes in the Holy Scriptures, ſo well known that I ſhall not trouble you with the recital of them.

Notwithſtanding which, it cannot be denied, that good Men fall into many Evils, and are harrasſed with great Afflictions in this World: but then the Providence of God uſually ordereth it ſo, that they are armed with great Patience to bear them, and find great comfort and ſupport under them, and make better uſe and improvement of them than others; ſo that one way or other they turn to their advantage. So the Apoſtle aſſures us, *Rom. 8. 28. We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.* All the Evils and Afflictions, which happen to good men, conſpire one way or other to the promoting of their happineſs, many times in this World, to be ſure they make a great addition to it in the other. So the ſame Apoſtle tels us, *2 Cor. 4. 17, 18. Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight*

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 weight of glory, whilst we look not, &c.  
 Vol. VI. And can we say God's Providence neglects us, when he rewards our temporal Sufferings with eternal Glory; when through *many hardships and tribulations*, he at last brings us to a *Kingdom*? Was *Joseph* neglected by God, when, by a great deal of hard usage, and a long imprisonment, he was raised to the highest dignity in a great Kingdom? Or rather, was not the Providence of God very remarkable towards him, in making those Sufferings so many Steps to his Glory, and the occasion of his Advancement? And is not God's Providence towards good men as kind and as remarkable, in bringing them to an infinitely better and more glorious Kingdom, by Tribulations and Sufferings; and making *our light Afflictions which are but for a moment, to work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*?

Thus you see what is implied in God's *care* of us in general; that he governs the World, and disposeth all Events; and particularly, that he is peculiarly concerned for good Men, and takes a more especial care of them. Let us now see of what force this Consideration

Consideration is, to perswade to the Duty enjoyned in the Text, *to cast all our care upon God*; that is, after all prudent Care and Diligence hath been used on our part, not to be anxious and solicitous about the event of things, but to leave that to God. Now this consideration, that *God cares for us*, should be an Argument to us, *to cast all our care upon him*, upon these two Accounts.

1. Because if *God cares for us*, our Concernments are in the best and safest hands.

2. Because all our Anxiety and Solitude will do us no good.

1. Because if *God cares for us*, our Concernments are in the best and safest hands, and where we should desire to have them; infinitely safer, than under any Care and Conduct of our own. And this ought to be a great satisfaction to our Minds, and to free us from all disquieting Thoughts; for if God undertakes the care of us, then are we sure that nothing shall happen to us, but by the disposal or permission of Infinite Wisdom and Goodness. There are many things indeed, which to us seem *Chance* and *Accident*; but in respect of God, they are *Providence* and *Design*;  
S they

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they may appear to happen by chance, or may proceed from the ill-will and malicious intent of second Causes; but they are all wisely designed; and as they are appointed or permitted by God, they are the result of the deepest Counsel, and the greatest Goodness. And can we wish that we and our Concernments should be in better or safer hands, than of Infinite Power and Wisdom, in conjunction with Infinite Love and Goodness? And if we be careful to do our Duty, and to demean our selves towards God as we ought, we may rest assured of his Love and Care of us; and if we do in good earnest believe the Providence of God, we cannot but think that he hath a peculiar regard to those that love and serve him, and that he will take a peculiar care of their Concernments, and that he can, and will dispose them better for us, than we could manage them our selves, if we were left to our selves, and our Affairs were put into *the hands of our own Counsel.*

Put the case we had the entire ordering and disposal of our selves, what were reasonable for us to do in this case? We would surely, according to our best

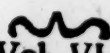
best wisdom and judgment, do the best we could for our selves; and when upon experience of our own manifold ignorance and weakness, we had found our weightiest Affairs and Designs frequently to miscarry, for want of foresight, or power, or skill to obviate and prevent the infinite Hazards and Disappointments which humane Affairs are liable to, we should then look about us; and if we knew any Person much wiser, and more powerful than our selves, who we believed did heartily love us, and wish well to us, we would out of kindness to our selves, ask his Counsel in our Affairs, and crave his assistance; and if we could prevail with him to undertake the care of our Concernments, we would commit them all to his Conduct and Government, in confidence of his great Wisdom and Good-will to us.

Now God is such an one, he loves us as well as we do our selves, and desires our Happiness as much, and knows infinitely better than we do, what means are most conducing to it, and will most effectually secure it. And every Man that believes thus of God, (as every Man must do, that believes there is a God,



 for these are the natural and essential  
Vol. VI. Notions which all Men have of the  
Deity) I say, every Man that believes  
thus of God, the first thing he would  
do (if he knew not already that God  
had voluntarily, and of his own ac-  
cord, undertaken the care of him and  
of his Affairs) would be to apply him-  
self to God, and to beseech him with all  
earnestness and importunity, that he  
would permit him to refer his Con-  
cernments to him, and be pleased to un-  
dertake the care of them; and he would,  
without any demur or difficulty, give  
up himself wholly to him, to guide and  
govern him, and to dispose of him as  
to him should seem best.

Now if God have prevented us here-  
in, and without our Desire taken this  
care upon himself, we ought to rejoice  
in it, as the greatest happiness that  
could possibly have befallen us; and  
we should without any farther care and  
anxiety, using our own best diligence,  
and studying to please him, chearfully  
leave our selves in his Hands, with the  
greatest confidence and security, that  
he will do all that for us which is real-  
ly best; and with a firm perswasion, that  
that condition, and those circumstances  
of

of Life, which he shall chuse for us,  Vol. VI.  
will be no other but the very same  
which we would chuse for our selves,  
if we were as wise as he.

And it is so natural for Men to think  
thus of God, that the very Heathen  
Poet had the same Idea of him, and  
upon that ground, adviseth us to com-  
mit all our Concernments to him.

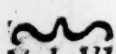
*Permites ipsis expendere numinibus,  
quid*

*Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile no-  
stris;*

*Nam pro jucundis, aptissima quaque da-  
bunt dii;*

*Charior est illis homo, quam sibi.*

Leave it, says he, to the wiser gods, to  
consider and determine what is fittest for  
thee, and most for thy advantage; and tho'  
they do not always give thee what thou de-  
sirest, and that which pleaseth thee best, yet  
they will give that which is most fit and  
convenient for thee; for Man is more dear  
to the gods, than he is to himself. Not  
much different from this, is the Divine  
Counsel of Solomon, Prov. 3. 5, 6. Trust  
in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean  
not unto thine own understanding. In all

 thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. It is considerable who it is that gives this Advice; the wisest of the Sons of men; and yet he adviseth to trust in God for direction, and not to lean to our own understandings.

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If therefore we be fully perswaded of God's infinitely Wise and Good Providence, we ought certainly to refer our selves to him, and perfectly to acquiesce in his disposal, and to rest satisfied in whatever he does, and whatever condition he assigns to us, we ought to be contented with it: if we be not, we find fault with his Wisdom, and reproach his Goodness, and wish the Government of the World in better hands.


So that a firm belief of the Providence of God, as it would take away all Anxiety concerning future Events, so would it likewise silence all those Murmurings and Discontents, which are apt to arise in us, when things fall out cross to our Desires, when Disasters and Disappointments happen to us, and the Providence of God casts us into Sicknes, or Poverty, or Disgrace. This quieted David, when he was ready to break out into murmuring at the Afflictions and Cala-

Calamities which befell him. *I held my peace (says he) and spake not a word, because thou Lord didst it.* And this likewise should keep us from fretting and vexing at Instruments, and second Causes; to consider that the Wise Providence of God over-ruleth and disposeth the Actions of Men, and that no harm can happen to us without his permission. This Consideration restrained *David's* Anger, under that high provocation of *Shimei*, when he follow'd him, reproaching him and cursing him; *let him alone, the Lord hath said unto him, curse David.* He consider'd that God's Providence permitted it; and looking upon it as coming from a higher hand, this calmed his Passion, and made him bear it patiently. If a Man be walking in the Street, and one sling Water upon him, it is apt to provoke him beyond all patience; but no man is in a passion for being wet ten times as much by Rain from Heaven. What Calamity soever befallerth us, when we consider it as coming from Heaven, and ordered and permitted there, this will still and hush our Passion, and make us with *Eli* to hold our peace, or only to say, *it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.*

  
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We are indeed liable to many things in this World, which have a great deal of evil and affliction in them, to Poverty, and Pain, and Reproach, and Restraint, and the loss of our Friends and near Relations, and these are great Afflictions, and very cross and distastful to us, and therefore when we are in Danger of any of these, and apprehend them to be making towards us, we are apt to be anxious and full of trouble, and when they befall us, we are prone to censure the Providence of God, and to judge rashly concerning it, as if all things were not ordered by it for the best: but we should consider, that we are very ignorant and short sighted Creatures, and see but a little way before us, are not able to penetrate into the Designs of God, and to look to the End of his Providence. We cannot (as *Solomon* expresseth it) *see the work of God from the beginning to the end*; whereas if we saw the whole design of Providence together, we should strangely admire the beauty and proportion of it, and should see it to be very wise and good. And that which upon the whole matter, and in the last issue and result of things,



is most for our good, is certainly best,   
how grievous soever it may seem for Vol. VI.  
the present. Sickneſs cauſed by Phy-  
ſick is many times more troubleſome  
for the preſent, than the Diſeaſe we  
take it for ; but every wiſe Man com-  
poſeth himſelf to bear it as well as he  
can, becauſe it is in order to his Health :  
the evils and afflictions of this life are  
the Phyſick, and Means of cure, which  
the Providence of God is often neceſſi-  
tated to make uſe of ; and if we did  
truſt our ſelves in the hands of this great  
Phyſician, we ſhould quietly ſubmit  
to all the ſeverities of his Providence,  
in confidence that they would *all work  
together for our good.*


When Children are under the go-  
vernment of Parents, or the diſcipline  
of their Teachers, they are apt to mur-  
mur at them, and think it very hard  
to be denyed ſo many things which  
they deſire, and to be conſtrained by  
ſeverities to a great many things  
which are grievous and tedious to them :  
but the Parent and the Maſter know  
very well, that it is their Ignorance  
and Inconſideratenefs which makes  
them to think ſo, and that when they  
come to Years, and to underſtand them-  
ſelves

~~~~~  
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selves better, then they will acknowledge, that all that which gave them so much discontent, was really for their good, and that it was their Childishness and Folly, which made them to think otherwise, and that they had in all probability been undone, had they been indulged in their humour, and permitted in every thing to have their own will; they had not Wit and Consideration enough, to trust the Discretion of their Parents and Governours, and to believe that even those things which were so displeasing to them, would at last tend to their good.

There is a far greater distance between the Wisdom of God and Men, and we are infinitely more Ignorant and Childish in respect of God, than our Children are in respect of us; and being perswaded of this, we ought to reckon, that while we are in this World, under God's care and discipline, it is necessary for our good, that we be restrained in many things, which we eagerly desire; and suffer many things that are grievous to us; and that when we come to Heaven, and are grown up to be Men, and *have put away childish thoughts*, and are come to understand things,

as

as they truly are, and not in a riddle,  Vol. VI.
and darkness, as we now do; then the
Judgement of God will break forth as the
light, and the righteousness of all his deal-
ings as the noon Day, then all the Rid-
dles of Providence will be clearly ex-
pounded to us, and we shall see a plain
Reason for all those Dispensations
which we were so much stumbled at,
and acknowledge the great Wisdom
and Goodness of them.

You see then what Reason there is
to refer our selves to the Providence of
God, and to cast all our care upon him, to
trust him with the Administration and
Disposal of all our Concernments, and
firmly to believe, that if we love God,
and be careful to please him, every
thing in the issue will turn to the best
for us; and therefore we should not
anxiously trouble our selves about the
Events of things, but resign up our selves
to the good pleasure of him, who dis-
poses all things according to the Counsel
of his Will, entirely trusting in his good-
ness, and in his Fatherly care of us, and
affection to us, that he will order all
things for us, for the best, referring
the success of all our Concernments to
him, in whose hands are all the ways of
the

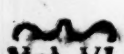
 *the Children of Men*, chearfully submit
Vol. VI. ing to his determination, and the Declarations of his Providence in every case.

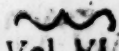
And this is a proper Expression of our Confidence in God's Wisdom and Goodness, to refer things to him before the Event, and to say with the Christians, *Acts 21. 14. The will of the Lord be done*, because this shews that we are persuaded that God will do better for us, than our own Counsel and Choice; and to submit to his will after the Event, is likewise a great instance of our Confidence in him, and that we believe that he hath done that which is best: For when God, by his Providence, declares his Will in any case, we should look upon it, as the Sentence of a wise and just Judge, in which all Parties concerned ought to acquiesce, and rest fully satisfied.

And this may well be expected from us Christians, who have much greater assurance of the *Particular* Providence of God, than the Heathen had; and yet some of them, were able to free themselves from all trouble and anxiety, from murmuring and discontent. Upon this Consideration, *Epiſtetus* (as *Arrian* tells

tells us) would express himself thus, *I had always rather have that which happens ; because I esteem that better which God wills, than that which I should will ; and again, lift up thine Eyes, (says he) with confidence to God, and say, henceforth, Lord, deal with me as thou pleasest, ὁμογνωμονῶ σοι, ἰσθ' εἰμι. I am of the same opinion with thee, just of the same mind that thou art ; I refuse nothing that seems good to thee ; lead me where thou wilt, Cloath me with what Garments thou pleasest, set me in a publick Place, or keep me in a private Condition, continue me in mine own Country, or banish me from it, bestow Wealth upon me, or leave me to conflict and struggle with Poverty, which of these thou pleasest, ἐγὼ σοὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων τέτων πρὸς ἀπολογίαν ἀπολογήσομαι, If Men shall censure this Providence towards me, and say thou dealest hardly with me, I will apologise for thee, I will undertake and maintain thy cause, that what thou dost is best for me. What could a Christian say more or better, by way of resignation of himself to the Providence of God ? It almost transports me to read such passages from a *Heathen*, especially if we consider in what condition *Epicætetus* was, he had a maimed and deformed Body,*

was

 was in the extremity of Poverty, Vol. VI. Slave, and very cruelly and tyrannically used, so that we can hardly imagine a Man in worse and more wretched Circumstances; and yet he justifies the Providence of God in all this, and not only submits to his Condition, but is contented with it, and embraces it, and since God hath thought it fittest and best for him, he is of the same mind, and thinks so too. I confess it doth not move me to hear *Seneca*, who flowed in wealth, and lived at ease, to talk magnificently, and to slight Poverty and Pain, as not worthy the Name of Evil and Trouble: but to see *this poor Man*, in the lowest Condition and worst Circumstances of Humanity, bear up so bravely, and with such a cheerfulness and serenity of Mind to entertain his hard Fortune, and this not out of stupidity, but from a wise sense of the Providence of God, and a firm perswasion of the wisdom and goodness of all his dealings, *this* who can chuse but be affected with it, as an admirable temper for a *Christian*, much more for a *Heathen*! To which we may apply that saying of our Lord, concerning the Heathen Centurion, *Verily I say*

unto you, I have not found so great faith, 
no not in Israel; so wise, so equal, so
firm a temper of Mind is seldom to
be found, no not amongst Christians. And
this is the *First* Consideration, That if
God cares for us, we and our Concern-
ments are in the best and safest hands,
and therefore we should cast all our care
upon God. The

2. is, Because all our Anxiety and
Care will do us no good; on the
contrary, it will certainly do us hurt.
We may fret and vex our own Spirits,
and make them restless, in the contem-
plation of the evils and disappointments
which we are afraid of, and may
make our lives miserable, in the sad
Reflexions of our own Thoughts; but
we cannot, by all our Anxiety and Care,
controul the course of Things, and
alter the Designs of Providence; we
cannot by all our vexation and trou-
ble over-rule Events, and make things
happen as we would have them. And
this is the Argument our Saviour
useth to this very purpose, *Mat. 6. 27.*
Which of you, by taking thought, can add
one cubit to his stature? So that all this
trouble is unreasonable, and to no
pur-


W purpose, because it hath no influence
Vol. VI. upon the Event, either to promote or hinder it. Things are governed and disposed by a higher hand, and placed out of our reach; we may deliberate and contrive, and use our best endeavours, for the effecting of our Designs, but we cannot secure the Event against a thousand interpositions of Divine Providence, which we can neither foresee nor hinder; but yet notwithstanding, these our endeavours are reasonable, because they are the ordinary Means which God hath appointed, for the procuring of good and prevention of Evil, and tho' they may miscarry, yet they are all we can do: but after this is done, trouble and anxiety about the Event is the vainest thing in the World, because it is to no purpose, nor doth at all conduce to what we desire; *we disquiet our selves in vain*, and we distrust God's Providence and Care of us, and thereby provoke him to defeat and disappoint us.

Let us then by these Considerations be perswaded to this Duty, the practice whereof is of continual and universal use in the whole course of our lives;

lives ; in all our affairs and concerns, after we have used our best Endeavours, let us sit down and be satisfied, and refer the rest to God, whose Providence governs the World, and takes care of all our Interests, and of the Interest of his Church and Religion, when they seem to be in greatest Danger.

We cannot but be convinced, that this is very reasonable, to leave the Management of things to him who made them, and therefore understands best how to order them. The government of the World is a very curious and complicated Thing, and not to be tamper'd with by every unskilful Hand ; and therefore as an unskilful Man, after he hath tampered a great while with a Watch, thinking to bring it into better order, and is at last convinced that he can do no good upon it, carries it to him that made it, to mend it and put it into order ; so must we do, after all our Care and Anxiety about our own private Concernments, or the publick State of Things, we must give over governing the World, as a business past our Skill, as a Province too hard, and a Knowledge

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 ledge too wonderful for us, and leave it to
Vol. VI. him, who made the World, to Govern
it, and take care of it.

And if we be not thus Affected and
Disposed, we do not believe the Provi-
dence of God, whatever profession we
make of it; if we did, it would have
an influence upon our Minds, to free
us from Anxious Care and Discontent.
Were we firmly perswaded of the Wil-
dom and Goodness of the Divine Pro-
vidence, we should confidently rely
upon it, and according to the Apostle's
advice here in the Text, *cast all our care
upon him, because he careth for us.*

SERMON

SERMON IX.

The Wisdom of God in the Redemption of Mankind.

I COR. I. 24.

— *Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.*

I Have in the ordinary course of my Preaching been treating of the Attributes and Perfections of God, more particularly those which relate to the Divine Understanding; the *Knowledge* and *Wisdom* of God. The *first* of these I have finish'd; and made some progress in the *second*, the *Wisdom* of God; which I have spoken to in general, and have propounded more particularly,

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particularly to consider those famous Instances and Arguments of the Divine Wisdom, in the *Creation* of the World; the *Government* of it; and the *redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ*. The two first of these I have spoken to, namely the *Wisdom of God*, which appears in the *Creation* and *Government* of the World. I come now to the

III. Instance of the Divine Wisdom, *the redemption of mankind by Jesus Christ*; which I shall, by God's assistance, speak to from these words, *Christ, the wisdom of God*.

The Apostle in the beginning of this Epistle, upon occasion of his mentioning the Divisions and Parties that were among the *Corinthians*, where one said, *I am of Paul*; another, *I am of Apollos*; asks them, whether *Paul was crucified for them?* or whether *they were baptized into the name of Paul?* To convince them that they could not pretend this, that they were Baptized into his Name, he tells them at the 14, and 15th verses; that *he had not so much as baptized any of them, except two or three*; so far was he from having Baptized them into his own Name; and at the 17th verse, he says, that his work, his principal work, was

to preach the Gospel, which he had done, ^{Vol. VI.} not with Humane Eloquence, *not in wisdom of words*, but with great plainness and simplicity, *lest the Cross of Christ should be made of none effect*; lest, if he should have used any Artifice, the Gospel should have been less powerful. And indeed his Preaching was unaffectedly plain, and therefore the Gospel did seem to very many to be a foolish and ridiculous thing. The Story which they told of *Christ Crucified*, was *to the Jews a stumbling block*, and *to the Greeks foolishness*. The *Jews*, who expected another kind of *Messias*, that should come in great Pomp and Glory, to be a mighty Temporal Prince, they were angry at the Story of a *crucifi'd Christ*. The *Greeks*, the Philosophers, who expected some curious Theories, adorned with Eloquence, and delivered and laid down according to the exact Rules of Art, they derided this plain and simple Relation of *Christ*, and of the Gospel.

But tho' this Design of the Gospel appeared silly and foolish to rash and inconsiderate and prejudiced Minds, yet *to them that are called*, to them that do believe, *both Jews and Gentiles*, *Christ*, the power of God, and the Wisdom of God;

Vol. VI. *Christ*, that is, the way of our Redemption by *Jesus Christ*, which the Apostle preached, *the wisdom of God*, an eminent Instance of it.

So that the *redemption of Man by Jesus Christ* is a Design of admirable *Wisdom*.

This I shall endeavour to confirm to you.

I. By general Testimonies of Scripture. And

II. By a more particular enquiry into the nature of this Design, and the Means how it is accomplish'd.

I. By Testimonies from Scripture. You know I have all along, in my Discourses of the Attributes of God, used this Method of proving them, from the Dictates of Natural Light, and the Revelation of Scripture: But now I must forsake my wonted Method, for here the Light of Nature leaves me. The Wisdom of Creation is manifest in *the things which are made*; *the heavens declare the glory of God's Wisdom, and the firmament shews his handy-work*. The Works of God do preach and set forth the Wisdom of the Creator; but the Sun, Moon, and Stars, do not preach the Gospel. The Wisdom of redemption is
Wisdom

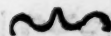
Wisdom in a mystery, hidden wisdom, which none of the Princes, or Philosophers, of this World knew. The sharpest Wits, and the highest and most raised Understandings amongst the Heathens, could say nothing of this. Here the Wisdom of the Wise, and the Understanding of the Prudent is posed, and we may make the Apostles challenge, v. 20. of this Chapter, Where is the Wise, where is the Disputer of this World? There is no Natural Light discovers Christ; the Wise men cannot find him out, unless a star be created on purpose to lead and direct to him. Therefore in this I shall only depend upon Divine Revelation. 1 Cor. 2. 7, 8. the Gospel is called the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the world unto our glory; Which none of the Princes of this world knew. Eph. 1. 7, 8. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded toward us in all Wisdom and Prudence. Eph. 3. 10, 11. The manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord. This work of our redemption by Jesus Christ is so various and admirable, that it is not be-

Vol. VI. low the Angels to know and understand it. *To the intent, that unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known the manifold wisdom of God.*

II. By inquiring more particularly into the nature of this Design, and the Means how it is accomplished. This is *Wisdom*, to fit Means to Ends; and the more difficult the End, the greater Wisdom is required to find out suitable and sufficient Means for the accomplishment, of the End. Now *the wisdom of redemption* will appear, if we consider the case of fallen Man; and what fit, and proper, and suitable Means, the Wisdom of God hath devised for our Recovery.

I. Let us consider the Case of fallen Man, which was very sad, both in respect of the Misery, and the Difficulty of it.

I. In respect of the Misery of it. Man, who was made Holy and Upright by God, having, by his voluntary Transgression, and wilful Disobedience, fall'n from him, did presently sink into a corrupt and degenerate, into a miserable and cursed Condition, of which Heaven and Earth, and his own Conscience bore him Witness. Man, being become a Sinner, is not only deprived
of

of the Image of God, but is liable to his Justice; here was his Misery.  Vol. VI.

2. The difficulty of the Case was this, Man could not recover himself and raise himself out of his own ruin; no Creature was able to do it; so that our help is only in God; and indeed he is a merciful God, and doth not desire our Ruin, nor delight in our Destruction: But suppose his Mercy never so willing to save us, will not his Holiness, and Justice, and Truth, check those forward Inclinations of his Goodness, and hinder all the Designs of his Mercy? Is not sin contrary to the Holy Nature of God? hath not he declared his Infinite hatred of it? hath not he threatned it with heavy and dreadful Punishment? and said, that *the sinner shall die*, that *he will not acquit the guilty*, nor let sin go unpunish'd? Should he now, without any satisfaction to his offended Justice, pardon the Sinner, remit his Punishment, and receive him to favour? would this be agreeable to his Holiness, and Justice, and Truth? would this become the Wise Governour of the World, who loves Righteousness and Order; who hates sin, and is obliged by

by the essential rectitude of his Nature
Vol. VI. to discountenance sin?

So that here is a conflict of the Attributes and Perfections of God. The Mercy of God pities our Misery, and would recover us, would open *Paradise* to us; but there is a *flaming Sword* that keeps us out; the incensed Justice of God that must be satisfied; and if he take vengeance of us, we are eternally ruin'd; if he spare us, how shall *Mercy and Justice meet together*? how shall God at once express his Love to the Sinner, and his hatred to sin? here is the difficulty of our Case.

II. Let us now enquire what Means the Wisdom of God useth for our recovery. The Wisdom of God hath devised this expedient to accommodate all these Difficulties, to reconcile the Mercy and Justice of God. The Son of God shall undertake this work, and satisfy the offended Justice of God, and repair the ruin'd Nature of Man. He shall bring God and Man together, make up this Gulph, and renew the Commerce and Correspondence between God and us, which was broken off by Sin. The work that God designs is the redemption of Man, that is, his recovery from

a state of Sin and Eternal Death, to a state of Holiness and Eternal Life. The Son of God is to engage in this Design of our Redemption, to satisfy the offended Justice of God toward us, so as to purchase our deliverance from the Wrath to come, and so as to restore us to the Image and Favour of God, that we may be sanctified, and be made Heirs of Eternal Life.

For opening of this, we will consider,

1. The fitness of the Person designed for this Work.

2. The fitness of the Means whereby he was to accomplish it.

1. The fitness of the Person design'd for this Work; and that was the *eternal Son of God*, who in respect of his Infinite Wisdom and Power, the Dignity and Credit of his Person, his dear-ness to his Father, and Interest in him, was very fit to undertake this Work, to mediate a Reconciliation between God and Man.

2. The fitness of the Means whereby he was to accomplish it; and these I shall refer to *two Heads*, his *Humiliation* and *Exaltation*. All the Parts of these are very subservient to the Design of our Redemption.

I. The

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I. The *Humiliation* of Christ, which consists of *three* principal Parts; his *Incarnation*, his *Life*, and his *Death*.

1. His *Incarnation*, which is set forth in Scripture by several Expressions; his being *made flesh*, and *dwelling among us*, John 1. 14. His being *made of the seed of David according to the flesh*, Rom. 1. 3. His being *made of a woman*, Gal. 4. 4. The *manifestation of God in the flesh*, 1 Tim. 3. 16. His *taking part of flesh and blood*, Heb. 2. 14. His *taking on him the seed of Abraham*, and *being made like unto his brethren*, Heb. 2. 16, 17. His *coming in the flesh*, 1 John 2. 2. All which signifies his taking upon him Humane Nature, and being really a Man as well as God. The Eternal Son of God, in the fulness of time took our Nature; that is, assumed a real Soul and Body into Union with the Divine Nature. Now this Person, who was really both God and man, was admirably fitted for the Work of our Redemption.

In general, this made him a fit Mediator, an equal and middle Person to interpose in this Difference, and take up this Quarrel between God and Man. Being both God and man, he was concerned for both Parties, and interested both in the Honour of God, and the Happiness

Happiness of Man, and engaged to be tender of both ; and to procure the one by such ways as might be consistent with the other.

More particularly, his *Incarnation* did fit him for those *two* Offices which he was to perform in his Humiliation, of *Prophet* and *Priest*.

1. The Office of *Prophet*, to teach us both by his *Doctrine* and his *Life*.

By his *Doctrine*. His being in the likeness of *Man*, this made him more familiar to us. He was a *Prophet raised up from among his Brethren*, as *Moses* speaks, and he makes this an Argument why we should hear him. Should God speak to us immediately by himself, we *could not hear him and live*. God condescends to us, and complies with the weakness of our Nature, and *raiseth up a Prophet from among our brethren*; We should *hear him*. And then his being *God*, did add Credit and Authority to what he spake ; he could confirm the *Doctrine* which he taught, by *Miracles*. Of his teaching us by his *Life*, I shall have occasion to speak presently.

2. For the Office of *Priest*. He was fit to be our *Priest*, because *he was taken from among Men*, as the *Apostle* speaks;

Vol. VI. speaks ; fit to suffer as being, *Man* having a body prepared, as it is *Heb. 10. 5.* and fit to satisfy by his sufferings for the Sins of all Men, as being *God*, which put an infinite Dignity and Value upon them, the sufferings of an *infinite Person* being equal to the offences done against an *Infinite God*. And thus the *Mercy* of God is exalted, without the Diminution of his *Justice*.

And as his *Incarnation* did qualify him for suffering, so for compassion, and fellow-suffering with us, *Heb. 2. 17, 18.* Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people ; for in that he himself hath suffer'd being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

2. His *Life* was a means admirably fitted to bring Men to Holiness and Goodness. I might go through all the parts of it, but because I intend to be very short upon these Heads, I shall only take notice of that Part of his Life, which was spent in his publick Ministry ; he went about doing good ; the *Doctrine* that he Preached was Calculated for the destroying of Sin, and the promoting of Holiness ; the great End and

and Design of it was to advance Righteousness, and Goodness, and Humility, and Patience, and Self-denial; to make us mortifie our sensual Desires, and brutish Passions, to contemn and renounce this present World; and this being the design of it, it was a most proper Engine to demolish the Works of the Devil: and to make way for the entertainment of his *Doctrine*, the whole frame of his *Life*, and all the circumstances of it did contribute. His *Life* was the practice of his *Doctrine*, and a clear comment upon it. The meanness of his Condition in the World, that he had no share of the possessions of it, were a great advantage to his *Doctrine* of self-denial and contempt of the World. *The Captain of our Salvation*, that he might draw off our Affections from the World, and shew us how little the things of it are to be valued, would himself have no share in it, *Mat. 8. 20. The Foxes have holes, and the Birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head.* The mean circumstances of his Condition were very eminently for the advantage of his Design; for had he not been stript of all worldly Accommoda-

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modations, he could not have been so free from suspicion of a worldly Interest and Design ; nay he could not have been so Considerable ; he was really *greater* for his Meanness. The very Heathens did account this true Greatness, (as we find in *Aristotle*) not to admire the Pleasures, and Greatness, and Pomp of the World. And that his Meanness might be no Disadvantage to him, those Evidences that he gave of his Divinity in the wonderful Things that he did, rendred him considerable, and gained more Reverence and Authority to his Doctrine, then his Meanness could bring Contempt upon it.

Besides, the manner of his Conversation was a very great Advantage to him ; he was of a very sweet and conversable and obliging Temper ; and by this Means he did gain upon the People, and was acceptable to them ; and thus he did apply himself to them in the most Humane ways, to make way for the Entertainment of his Doctrins. The Miracles that he wrought did confirm his Doctrine beyond all Exception, as being a Divine Testimony, and setting the Seal of God to the truth of it ; yet because


because many were blinded with prejudice, and tho' they *did see*, yet would not see, Christ the Wisdom of God did so order the business of his Miracles, as to make them Humane ways of winning upon them, for they were generally such as were beneficial, *he healed all manner of Diseases and Maladies* by this Miraculous Power; and so his Miracles did not only tend to confirm his Doctrine, as they were *Miracles*, but to make way for entertainment of it, as they were *benefits*; this was a sensible demonstration to them that he *intended* them good, because he *did* them good; they would easily believe, that he who healed their *Bodies*, would not harm their *Souls*. This for his *Life*.

III. His *Death*, which was the lowest step of his *Humiliation*, and the consummation of his sufferings. Now the *Death* of Christ did eminently contribute to this Design of our Redemption. The Death of Christ did not only expiate the guilt of Sin, and pacify Conscience, by making plenary Satisfaction to the Divine Justice; but did eminently contribute to the killing of Sin in us, *Rom. 6. 6. Knowing this, that our old Man is crucified with him, that the*

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body

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 body of sin might be destroyed, that
 Vol. VI. henceforth we might not serve Sin. Rom.
 8. 3. God sending his own Son in the like-
 ness of sinful flesh, and for sin (that is
 by being a sacrifice for Sin) condemned
 sin in the flesh. The Death of Christ
 convinceth Sin to be a great Evil; and
 doth Condemn it, because the impartial
 Justice of God did so severely punish
 it in his own Son, when he appeared
 in the Person of a Sinner; and this is
 the most powerful Argument to us to
 crucifie Sin, that it crucified our Sa-
 viour. That so Innocent and Holy a
 Person should suffer so cruel and igno-
 minious a Death for our Sins, should
 set us for ever against it, and make
 us hate it with a perfect hatred.

The circumstances of Christ's suffer-
 ings are with admirable Wisdom fit-
 ted for the conquering of Sin and Sa-
 tan. Sin came by the *Woman*: the seed
 of the *Woman* suffers for Sin, and by
 suffering Conquers it. Sin began in
 the *Garden*: and there our Saviour
 began his sufferings for Sin. Sin came
 by the *Tree*: and Christ bears the curse
 of it in hanging upon the *Tree*, and
 crucifies it by his Cross.

And

And as he conquer'd sin, so he overcame Satan by his own Arts. The Devil found Christ in the likeness of a Man, he judged him Mortal, and his great Design was to procure his Death, and get him into his Grave. Christ permits him to bring about his Design, he lets him enter into Judas, he lets the Jews crucifie, and put him into his Grave, and roll a great stone upon it : but here his *Divine Wisdom* appears, in ruining the Devil by his own Design, and *snaring him in the works of his hands* ; Heb. 2. 14. *By death he destroys him, that had the power of death, that is the Devil.*

I know the sufferings of Christ were, by the *wise of the World*, made the great Objection against the *Wisdom* of this dispensation ; the *Cross of Christ* was to the *Greeks foolishness* : and yet the *wisest* of them had determined otherwise in general, tho' not in this particular Case. Plato (in the second Book of his *Common-Wealth*) saith, " That a Man " may be a perfect Pattern of Justice " and Righteousness, and be approved " by God and Men, he must be stript " of all the things of this World, he " must be poor and disgraced, and be


 Vol. VI. "accounted a wicked and unjust Man,
 "he must be whipt, and tormented,
 "and crucified as a Malefactor; which
 is, as it were, a prophetical Description
 of our Saviour's sufferings. And
Arrian, in his *Epiet.* describing a Man fit
 to reform the World, whom he calls
 "the Apostle, the Messenger, the
 "Preacher and Minister of God, saith,
 "he must be without House and Har-
 "bour, and worldly Accommodations;
 "must be armed with such Patience for
 "the greatest sufferings, as if he were a
 "Stone, and devoid of Sense; he must be
 "a spectacle of Misery and Contempt
 "to the World. So that by the acknow-
 ledgment of these *two* wise Heathens,
 there was nothing in the sufferings of
 Christ that was unbecoming the *Wisdom*
 of God, and improper to the End and
 Design of Christ's coming into the
 World; besides that they served a fur-
 ther end, which *they* did not dream of,
 the *satisfying of Divine Justice*.

Secondly, *His Exaltation*. The several
 parts of which, his *Resurrection*, and *As-
 cension*, and *sitting the right hand of God*,
 were eminently subservient to the per-
 fecting and carrying on of this Design,

The

The *Resurrection* of Christ is the great confirmation of the truth of all that he deliver'd, Rom. 1. 4. Declared to be the son of God with power, *ὁ ἐκ νεκρῶν ὤρθης ἐν δυνάμει*, by the *Resurrection from the Dead*. This great Miracle of his *Resurrection* from the Dead did determine the Controversie, and put it out of all Doubt and Question, that he was the Son of God. And then his *Ascension*, and sitting at the right hand of God, this gives us the assurance of a Blessed Immortality, and is a demonstration of a life to come, and a pledge of everlasting Glory and Happiness. And can any thing tend more to the encouragement of Obedience, and to make us Dead to the Pleasures and Enjoyments of this life, than the assurance of Eternal Life and Happiness.

And then the Consequents of his *Exaltation*, they do eminently conduce to our recovery. The sending of the Holy Ghost to lead us into all truth, to sanctifie us, to assist us, and to comfort us under the greatest Troubles and Afflictions; and the powerful *Intercession* of Christ in our behalf; and his return to *Judgment*; the expectation whereof is the great Argument to Repentance

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and Holiness of Life. *Acts 17. 30, 31.* And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all Men every where to repent : Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the World in righteousness, by that Man whom he hath ordained, whereof he hath given assurance unto all Men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And thus I have endeavoured to prove that the Redemption of Man by Jesus Christ is a Design of admirable Wisdom.

The use I shall make of it, is to convince us of the Unreasonableness of unbelief, and the Folly and Madness of Impenitency.

First, The unreasonableness of Unbelief. The Gospel reveals to us the wise Counsel and Dispensation of God for our Redemption; and those who disbelieve the Gospel, they reject the counsel of God against themselves, as it is said of the unbelieving Pharisees and Lawyers, *Luke 7. 30.* The Gospel reveals to us a design so reasonable and full of Wisdom, that they who can disbelieve it are desperate Persons, devoted to ruin, *1 Cor. 1. 18.* The cross of Christ is to them that perish foolishness. *2 Cor. 4. 3, 4.* But if our Gospel be hid, it is hid

to them that are lost; in whom the God of this World hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. The Gospel carries so much light and evidence in it, that it cannot be hid from any but such whose Eyes are blinded by the Devil and their Lusts.

He that will duly weigh and consider Things, and look narrowly into this wise dispensation of God, shall find nothing to object against it; nay shall discover in it the greatest motives and inducements to believe. We are apt to believe any thing that is reasonable, especially if it be for our Advantage; now this wise dispensation of God is not only reasonable in it self, but beneficial to us; it does at once highly gratifie our Understandings, and satisfy our Interest; why should we not then believe and entertain it.

I. The design of the Gospel is reasonable, and gratifies our Understandings. And in this respect the Gospel hath incomparable Advantages above any other Religion. The end of all Religion is to advance Piety and Holiness, and real Goodness among Men;

and the more any Religion advanceth these, the more reasonable it is. Now the great Incitements and Arguments to Piety, are the Excellency and Perfection of the Divine Nature ; fear of Punishment, and hopes of Pardon and Rewards. Now the Gospel represents all these to the greatest advantage.

1. It represents the Perfections of God to the greatest advantage, especially those which tend most to the promotion of Piety, and the love of God in us ; his *Justice* and *Mercy*.

(1.) His *Justice*. The Gospel represents it inflexible in its Rights, and inexorable, and that will not in any case let Sin go unpunish'd. The impartiality of the Divine Justice appears in this Dispensation, that when God pardons the Sinner, yet he will punish Sin so severely in his own Son who was the Surety. Now what could more tend to discountenance Sin, and convince us of the great evil of it?

(2.) His *Mercy*. This Dispensation is a great demonstration of the Mercy, and Goodness, and Love of God, in sending his Son to die for Sinners, and in saving *us* by devoting and sacrificing *him*, John 3. 16. *For God so loved*
the

the world, that he gave his only begotten Son. Rom. 5. 8. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet Sinners, Christ died for us. 1 John 4. 9, 10. In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Now this representation of God's Mercy and Love which the Gospel makes, is of great force and efficacy to melt our Hearts into love to God.

2. The Second Argument to Piety is fear of Punishment. The Gospel hath revealed to us the misery of those who continue in their Sin; it hath made clear and terrible discoveries of those Torments which attend sinners in another World, and hath open'd to us the Treasures of God's Wrath; so that now under the Gospel, hell is naked before us, and destruction hath no covering; and this is one thing which makes the Gospel so powerful an Engine to destroy sin, Rom. 1. 16, 18. The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation; for therein is the wrath of God revealed

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 Vol. VI. *vealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men.*

3. Hopes of Pardon and Reward. And this, added to the former, renders the Gospel the most powerful Instrument to take men off from sin, and engage them to Holiness, that can be imagin'd. The Means to draw Men from sin, when they are once awaken'd with the fear of Vengeance, is hopes of Pardon and Mercy ; and the way to encourage Obedience for the future, is hope of Reward. Now as an Argument to us to retreat and draw back from sin, the Gospel promises pardon and indemnity to us ; and as an incitement to Holiness, the Gospel opens Heaven to us, and sets before us everlasting Glory and Happiness, and gives us the greatest assurance of it.

This is the *First*, The Design of the Gospel is *reasonable*, in that it does eminently and directly serve the ends of Piety and Religion.

II. This Dispensation of God is *beneficial* to us, and satisfies our Interest ; and this adds to the unreasonableness of our Unbelief, this Design of God being not only *reasonable in it self*, but *desirable to us*, that it should be so ; because  
 of

of the eminent Advantages that rebound to us by it. The Design of the Gospel is to deliver from the Guilt and Dominion of Sin, and the Tyranny of Satan; to restore us to the Image and Favour of God; and by making us partakers of a Divine Nature, to bring us to Eternal Life. And is there any thing of real Advantage which is not comprehended in this? Is it not desirable to every Man, that there should be a way whereby our guilty Consciences may be quieted and appeased; whereby we may be delivered from the fear of Death and Hell? Is it not desirable to be freed from the slavery of our Lusts, and rescued from the Tyranny and Power of the great Destroyer of Souls? Is it not desirable to be like God, and to be assured of his Love and Favour, who is the best Friend, and the most dangerous Enemy; and to be secur'd, that when we leave this World, we shall be unspeakably happy for ever? Now the Gospel conveys these Benefits to us; and if this be the Case of the Gospel, and there be nothing in this Design of our Redemption, but what is Wise and Reasonable, and exceedingly for our Benefit and Advantage;

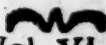


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tage; why should any Man be so averse to the Belief of it? Why should Unbelief be counted a piece of Wit? Is it Wit to set our selves against Reason, and to oppose our best Interest? 'Tis Wickedness, and Prejudice, and inconsiderateness which disbelieves the Gospel. Those who do consider things welcome this good News, and embrace these glad Tidings. *Wisdom is justified of her Children.* To them who are truly sensible of their own Interest, and willing to accept of reasonable Evidence, this is not only a true saying, but worthy of all acceptation; that *Christ came into the World to save sinners.*

Secondly, This doth convince Men of the madness and folly of impenitency. Now the *Wisdom* of God hath contrived such a way of our Recovery, and by the Declaration of God's Wrath, and displeasure against sin, hath given us such Arguments to Repentance, and by discovering a way of Pardon and Mercy, hath given us such encouragement to Repentance, how great must the Folly of impenitency be? For consider,

1. That impenitency Directly sets it self against the *Wisdom* of God. If  
after

after all this we continue in our Sins,  we reject the counsel of God against our selves, we despise the *Wisdom* of God, and charge that with Folly; and we do it against our selves, to our own injury and ruine. If we live in our Sins, and cherish our lusts, we directly oppose the end of our Redemption, we contradict the great Design of the Gospel, we condemn the admirable Contrivance of God's *Wisdom*, who sent his Son into the World on purpose to destroy Sin; for we uphold that which he came to destroy, 1 John 3. 5. *Ye know that he was manifested to take away our Sins.* Now shall we continue in Sin, when we know, the Son of God was manifested to take away Sin? God cannot but take it very ill at our hands, when he hath laid out the *Riches of his Wisdom* in this design, for us to go about to defeat him in it; this is at once to be unthankful to God, and injurious to our selves; 'tis such a madness, as if a condemned Man should despise a Pardon, as if a Prisoner should be fond of his Fetters, and refuse Deliverance; as if a Man, desperately sick should fight with his Physician, and put away Health from him. If we do not comply with the *wisdom of God*, which hath contrived our recovery; we  
for sake

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 *forsake our own mercy, and neglect a great*  
 Vol. VI. *Salvation ; we love death, and hate our own*  
*Souls, Prov. 8. 14, 15, 16.*

2. Consider, we cannot expect the wisdom of God should do more for our recovery, than hath been already done ; the wisdom of God will not try any further means. Mat. 21. 37. *last of all he sent his Son.* If we despise this way, if we tread under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the Covenant, whereby we are sanctified, an unholy thing, there will remain no more sacrifice for sin, Heb. 10. 26, 29. What can expiate the guilt of sin, if the Blood of Christ do not? What shall take us off from sin, what shall sanctifie us, if the blood of the Covenant be ineffectual? We resist our last Remedy, and make void the best Means the Wisdom of God could devise for our Recovery, if, after the revelation of the Gospel, we continue in our Sins.

3. If we frustrate this Design of God's Wisdom for our Recovery, our Ruin will be the more dreadful and certain. Impenitency under the Gospel will increase our Misery. *If Christ had not come, we had had no sin*, in comparison of what we now have ; *but now our sin remains,*  
 and

and there is no cloak for our sin, *οὐκ ἔστιν ἱκετις ἡμῶν*. We shall not be able at the day of Judgment to Preface any thing by way of Excuse or Apology for our Impenitency. What shall we be able to say to the Justice of God, when that shall condemn us, who rejected his Wisdom, which would have saved us. We would all be saved, but we would be saved without Repentance; now the Wisdom of God hath not found out any other way to save us from Hell, but by saving us from our sins. And thou that will not submit to this Method of Divine Wisdom, take thy Course, and let's see how thou wilt escape the damnation of hell. I will conclude all with those dreadful words which the wisdom of God pronounceth against those that despise her, and refuse to hearken to her Voice, Prov. 1. 24, 25, 26. *Because I have called, and ye refused, I have stretched out my Hand, and no man regarded; But ye have set at naught my Counsel, and would none of my reproof: I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.* They who will not comply with the Counsel of God for their Happiness, they shall inherit the

**W** the Condition which they have chosen to themselves; *they shall eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.*

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SERMON



# SERMON X.

The Justice of God in the  
distribution of Rewards and  
Punishments.

GEN. XVIII. 25.

*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do  
right?*

**I**N treating of the *Attributes* of God,  
I have considered *those* which relate  
to the *Divine Understanding*, viz.  
*Knowledge* and *Wisdom*; I come now to  
consider *those* which relate to the *Divine*  
*Will*, viz. these *four*, the *Justice*, the  
*Truth*, the *Goodness*, and the *Holiness*  
of God. I begin with the *First*, name-  
ly, the *Justice* of God.

X

At

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At the 17 verse of this chapter, God, by a great and wonderful Condescension of his goodness, reveals to *Abraham* his Intention concerning the Destruction of *Sodom* ; upon this, *Abraham* v. 23. interceded with God for the saving of the Righteous Persons, that were there ; and to this end, he Pleads with God his *Justice* and *Righteousness*, with which he apprehended it to be in consistent, *to destroy the Righteous with the wicked*, which, without a Miracle, could not be avoided in a general Destruction. *Wilt thou also destroy the Righteous, with the Wicked? Peradventure there be fifty Righteous within the City, wilt thou also destroy, and not spare the place for the fifty Righteous that are therein? that be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the Righteous with the Wicked, and that the Righteous should be as the Wicked, that be far from thee, shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?* This Negative Interrogation is equivalent to a vehement affirmation, *shall not the Judge all the Earth do right?* that is, *undoubtedly he will.* This we may take for a certain and undoubted Principle, that *in the distribution of rewards and punishments the Judge*

Judge of the World will do Righteously.

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So that the Argument that lies under our Consideration is the *Justice of God in the distribution of Rewards and Punishments*, for the clearing of which, we will consider it,

*First*, In *Hypothesis*, in regard to the particular Case, which is here put by *Abraham* in the Text.

*Secondly*, In *Thesis*, we will consider it in General, in the *Distribution of Rewards and Punishments*.

*First*, We will consider it in *Hypothesis*, in regard to the particular Case which is here put by *Abraham* in the Text, and the rather, because if we look well into it, there is something of real Difficulty in it, not easie to be cleared; for *Abraham's* reasoning, if it be true, does plainly Conclude, that it would have been *unrighteous* with God in the destruction of *Sodom*, not to make a difference between the Righteous and the Wicked, but to involve them equally in the same common Destruction. *That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the Righteous with the Wicked, and that the Righteous should be as the Wicked, that be far from thee,*

*thee, shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right? as if he had said, surely the Judge of all the Earth will never do so unrighteous a Thing.*

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And yet notwithstanding this, we see it is very usual for the Providence of God to involve good Men in general Calamities, and to make no visible difference between the *Righteous* and the *Wicked*. Now the difficulty is, how to reconcile these appearances of Providence with this reasoning of *Abraham* in the Text.

And for the doing of this, I see but one possible way, and that is this, that *Abraham* does not here speak concerning the Judgments of God which befall Men in the ordinary Course of his Providence, which many times happen promiscuously, and involve good and bad Men in the same ruine; and the reason hereof is Plain, because God in his ordinary Providence does permit the Causes, which produce these Judgments, to Act according to their own Nature, and they either *cannot* or *will not* make any distinction; for the Calamities which ordinarily happen in the World are produced by two sorts of Causes either those which we call *Natural*, or those which are *Voluntary*.

*Natural*

*Natural* Causes, such as Wind, and Thunder, and Storms, and the infection of the Air, and the like, these acting by a Necessity of Nature, without any Knowledge or Choice, *can* make no distinction between the Good and the Bad. And the *Voluntary* Causes of Calamities, as Men are, they many times *will* make no difference between the *Righteous* and the *Wicked*; nay many times they are Maliciously bent against the *Righteous*, and the effects of their Malice fall heaviest upon them. Now we say that things happen in the way of ordinary Providence, when *Natural* Causes are permitted to Act according to their *Nature*, and *Voluntary* Causes are left to their *Liberty*; and therefore in the course of ordinary Providence, it is not to be expected that such a distinction should be made; it is neither possible, nor does Justice require it; it is not possible, supposing *Natural* Causes left to Act according to their *Nature*, and *Voluntary* Causes to be left to their *Liberty*; nor does Justice require it, for every Man is so much a Sinner, that no evil that befalls him in this World, can be said to be unjust in respect of God.



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So that *Abraham* is not here to be understood, as speaking of such Judgments as befall Men in the ordinary course of God's Providence, in which, if the Good and Bad be involv'd alike, it cannot be expected to be otherwise, nor is there any injustice in it; but *Abraham* here speaks of Miraculous and Extraordinary Judgments, which are immediately inflicted by God for the Punishment of some crying Sins, and the example of the World, to deter others from the like. And such was this Judgment, which God intended to bring upon *Sodom*, and which *Abraham* hath Relation to in this Discourse of his. In *this* Case it may be expected from the *Justice* of God, that a Difference should be made between the *Righteous* and the *Wicked*; and that for these Reasons.

1. Because this is a Judgment which God himself executes. It is not an Event of common Providence, which always follows the Nature of its Cause; but an Act of God, as a Judge. Now it is essential to a Judge to make a Discrimination between the Good and the Bad, so as to punish the one, and spare the other; and this is as necessary

cessary to all proper *Acts of Judgment* in this World, as the other; there being no other difference between them, but that one is a *Particular Judgment*, and the other the *General Judgment* of the whole World.

2. When God goes out of the way of his ordinary Providence in Punishing, it may reasonably be expected that he should make a Difference between the Good and the Bad; for the Reason, why he does not in his common Providence is, because he will not break and interrupt the establish'd order of things, upon every little occasion: But when he does go besides the common course of Things in punishing, the Reason ceaseth, which hindered him before from making a Difference; and 'tis reasonable enough to expect, that in the inflicting of a *Miraculous Judgment*, a *Miraculous Difference* should be made. Without making this difference, the end of these *Miraculous Judgments* would not be attained, which is, remarkably to punish the crying Sins of Men, and by that example to deter others from the like Sins: But if these Judgments should fall promiscuously upon the *Righteous* and the *Wicked*, it

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would not be evident, that they were designed for the Punishment of such Sins, when Men did see, that they fell likewise upon those who were not guilty of those Sins, and consequently the example could not be so effectual to deter Men from Sin.

Upon all these accounts you see that *Abraham's* reasoning was very Strong and well Grounded, as to those Judgments which are *Miraculous* and *Extraordinary*, and *immediately* inflicted by God, for the Punishment of great and hainous Sins, which was the Case he was speaking of. And accordingly we find, that in these Judgments which have been *Immediately* and *Miraculously* inflicted by God, he hath always made this difference between the *Righteous* and the *Wicked*. In the *Deluge* which he brought upon the old World, the Spirit of God gives this Reason why the Judgment was so universal, because *all Flesh had corrupted his way upon the Earth*; and the Reason, why he saved *Noah* and his Family was, because in this general corruption of Mankind, he alone was *Righteous*; *thee have I seen Righteous before me in this Generation*. So likewise in that *Miraculous*

Judg-

Judgment of *Korah* and his Company, when God made a new thing, and the Earth opened her mouth to swallow them up, none perished but he and his complices, the rest had warning given them by God to remove from the tents of those wicked Men. Thus you see that as to the particular Case in the Text, *Abraham's* reasoning concerning the Justice of God is very firm, and concluding. I proceed to the

Second, Thing, which was that, which I principally intended to Discourse upon, viz. to consider the Justice of God in general, in the distribution of Rewards and Punishments. And here I cannot but grant, that the best Evidence of this is yet wanting. We have clear demonstrations of the Power and Wisdom, and Goodness of God in this vast and admirable frame of Things which we see: but we must stay till the Day of Judgment for a clear and full Manifestation of the Divine Justice; for which Reason the Day of Judgment is in Scripture call'd, the Day of the Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God. But in the mean time we may receive sufficient assurance of this, both from Natural Reason, and from Divine Revelation.

From

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I. From *Natural Reason*, which tells us, that *God loves Righteousness* and *hates Iniquity*, and consequently that it must be agreeable to his Nature to countenance and encourage the *one*, and to discountenance the *other*; that is, to give some publick Testimony of his liking and Affection to the *one*, and of his Hatred and Dislike of the *other*, which cannot otherwise be done, but by *Rewards* and *Punishments*.

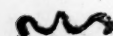
But however the Heathen reasoned about this matter, whatever premises they laid, they firmly believed the conclusion, that *God is Just*. *Plato* lays down this as a certain and undoubted Principle, "that God is in no wise unjust, but as Righteous, as is possible, and that we cannot resemble God more, than in this quality and disposition. So likewise *Seneca* tells us, "That the Gods are neither capable of receiving an injury, nor of doing any thing that is unjust. *Antoninus* the great Emperour and Philosopher, speaking doubtfully, whether good Men are extinguish'd by Death, or remain afterwards, "If it be just, says he, you may be sure it is so: if it be not just, you may certainly conclude the contrary,

"for



for God is just, and being so, he will do nothing that is unjust or unreasonable. And indeed the Heathen Philosophers looked upon this as the great sanction of all moral Precepts, that God was the *Witness* and the *Avenger* of the breach and violation of them, *Qui facit, deus ipse vindex erit, If any Man do contrary to them, God himself will punish it*; which shews, that there is a *Natural Awe* upon the Minds of Men of the *Divine Justice*, which will overtake offenders either in this World or the other. But this will more clearly appear in the

2. Place, from *Scripture*, or *Divine Revelation*. And those Texts which I shall produce to this purpose, may be reduced to these *two Heads*; either such as prove the *rectitude of the Divine Nature* and his *Justice* in general; or such as speak more particularly of the *Justice* and *Equity* of his Providence in the *distribution of Rewards and Punishments*. I begin, *first*, with those which declare the *rectitude of the Divine Nature*, and the *Justice* of God in general, and that either by attributing this Perfection to him, or by removing the contrary, *injustice*

 justice and *unrighteousness* at the great  
Vol. VI. est distance from him.

1. Those which attribute this Perfection to God. I shall mention but a few of many, *Psal. 129. 4. The Lord is Righteous. Dan. 9. 7. O Lord! Righteousness belongeth unto thee.* This good Men have acknowledged, when they have lain under the hand of God, *Ezra. 9. 15. O Lord God of Israel, thou art Righteous.* And this the worst of Men have been forced to own, when they have been in extremity, *Ex. 9. 27. then Pharoah said, the Lord is Righteous.* This hath been likewise acknowledged by those who have layn under the greatest temptation to doubt of it, *Jer. 12. 1. Righteous art thou O Lord, when I plead with thee: yet let me talk with thee of thy judgments, wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?* The Prophet, notwithstanding he saw the prosperous Condition of wicked Men, and the afflicted state of the godly, which seemed hard to be reconcile with the *Justice* of God's Providence, yet before he would so much as reason about it, he lays down this as a certain conclusion, *Righteous art thou, O Lord.* To this Head likewise belong

along all those Texts which speak of *Righteousness*, as *God's dwelling Place* and *his Throne*, of *his Delight in Justice*, and of the *Duration* and *Eternity* of it, which I need not particularly recite.

2. There are likewise other Texts, which remove the contrary, *viz. in-justice and unrighteousness* at the greatest Distance from God, as being most contrary to his Nature and Perfection. Deut. 32. 4. *A God of truth, and without iniquity.* 2 Chron. 19. 7. *There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor accepting of Persons, nor taking of Gifts.* Job 8. 3. *Doth God pervert Judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert Justice?* which is a vehement negation of the Thing. Job 34. 10, 11, 12. *Far be it from God, that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a Man shall he render unto him, and cause every Man to find according to his ways. Yea surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert Judgment.* Rom. 9. 14. *What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.*

Secondly, There are other Texts which speak more particularly of the *Justice and Righteousness of God in the distribution*

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*tion of Rewards and Punishments.* 'Tis true indeed, the *Justice* of God doth not constantly appear in this World in the dispensations of his Providence, because this is a time of Patience and forbearance to Sinners, and of tryal and exercise to good Men ; but there is a Day a coming, when all things shall be set straight, and every Man shall receive the just reward of his Deeds, when the *Justice* of God shall be evident to all the World, and every Eye shall see it, and shall acknowledge *the Righteous Judgment* of God ; and this the Scripture most clearly and expressly declares unto us ; and hence it is, that *the Day of Judgment* is call'd *the Day of the Revelation of the Righteous Judgment of God.* The *Righteousness* of God doth not now so clearly appear, but that there are many Clouds over it ; but there shall be *a Day of Revelation*, when the *Righteousness* of God shall be made manifest to all the World.

The *remunerative Justice* of God shall then appear in the rewarding the Righteous ; and the *punitive Justice* of God in punishing the Wicked and Ungodly, so that a Man shall say, verily there is a reward for the Righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth the World. Now

Now the *Righteousness* of this vengeance of God, which God will take upon Sinners, is further set forth to us in Scripture, from the *Equity* and *Impartiality* of it.

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I. From the *Equity* of it,

1. In that the Sins of Men have justly deserved the Punishment, that shall come upon them, *Rom. 1. 32. Who knowing the judgment of God, δικαιωμα τῆ θεῶ, the righteous judgment of God, that they which commit such things, are worthy of Death.*

2. In that the Judgment of God shall be proportioned to the Degree and Heinousness of Mens Sins; so as the lesser or greater Sins shall be punished with more or less Severity. So our Saviour threatens to those who continue impenitent under the Gospel and the advantages of it, their case shall be more sad than *that of Tyre and Sidon*, and *it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the Day of Judgment, than for them.* *Mat. 11. 20, 21. and Luke 12. 47, 48.* There you have different Degrees of Punishment threatened, proportionable to the Aggravations of the Sins, which Men have committed; *The servant which knew his Lord's will, and prepared*



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*pared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew it not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes; and so proportionably of all other Aggravations of Sins, for to whom much is given, of him shall much be required, and unto whom Men have committed much, of him they will ask the more. So likewise God will vindicate the contempt of the Gospel more severely, than of the Law, because the confirmation of it is clearer, and the Salvation offered by it greater. Heb. 2. 2, 3, 4. If the word spoken by Angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape? &c. And so, Heb. 10. 28, 29. He that despised Moses his law died without mercy under two or three Witnesses, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God? &c.*

II. The Righteousness of this Judgment is further set forth to us in Scripture by the impartiality of it. Hither belong all those Texts, which remove from God that *προσωποληψία*, that respect of Persons, which is so incident to humane Tribunals. Now respect of Per-

sons

sons is in distribution of Justice, and hath regard to some external qualities or circumstances of the Persons, which do not appertain to the merit of the cause, and upon Account of those circumstances, to deal unequally with those, whose Case is equal; as when two Persons, who are equally guilty of a Crime, are brought to their Tryal, and the one is Condemned, and the other acquitted, upon the Account of Friendship, or Relation, or some other Interest, because one is Poor and the other Rich, the one hath powerful Friends to intercede for him, the other not, the one brings a Gift or Bribe, the other not, or upon any other account, besides the pure Merits of the Cause; I say to deal thus in the distribution of Justice, is *respect of Persons*. Otherwise in matters of meer grace and favour, *respect of Persons* hath no Place, according to that common rule of Divines, προσωποληψία locum non habet in gratuitis, sed in debitis. Now this the Scripture every where speaks of, as a thing very far from God, Deut. 10. 17. The Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty and a terrible, which regardeth not Persons, nor taketh re-

Y wards.

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wards. 2 Chron. 19. 7. *There is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of Persons, nor taking of Gifts.* Job 34. 18, 19. *Is it fit to say to a King, thou art Wicked? or to Princes, ye are ungodly? how much less to him that accepteth not the Persons of Princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they are all the work of his hands.* Rom. 2. 6. *Who will render to every Man according to his deeds: for there is no respect of Persons with God.* Acts 10. 34, 35. *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of Persons, but in every Nation: he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.* Eph. 6. 8, 9. The Apostle there presseth the duties of Servants to Masters, from this Consideration, that *whatsoever good thing any Man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free, and at the 9th. v. Ye Masters, do the same thing unto them, forbearing threatening; knowing that your Master also is in Heaven, neither is there respect of Persons with him.* He maketh this likewise an Argument, why Men should not oppress and deal deceitfully one with another, Col. 3. 25. *But he that doth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there*

there is no respect of Persons. And in General, St. Peter urgeth this Consideration upon all Men to deter them from Sin in any kind, 1 Pet. 1. 17. *And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of Persons judgeth according to every Man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.*

And besides that the Scripture doth remove this at the greatest Distance from God, it gives us also several instances of the impartiality of the Divine Justice, that it is not to be perverted and turned aside by any of those extrinsecal Considerations which commonly sway with Men; it is not to be prevailed with and overcome by Flattery and Entreaties, Mat. 7. 21, 22. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in Heaven, &c.* The Divine Justice is not to be imposed upon by good Words, and external shews, and false Professions; so neither by any external Relation to him; For many shall come from the East, and from the West, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of God, but the Children of the

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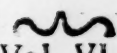
And besides that the Scripture doth remove this at the greatest Distance from God, it gives us also several instances of the impartiality of the Divine Justice, that it is not to be perverted and turned aside by any of those extrinsecal Considerations which commonly sway with Men; it is not to be prevailed with and overcome by Flattery and Entreaties, Mat. 7. 21, 22. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: but he that doth the will of my Father which is in Heaven, &c.* The Divine Justice is not to be imposed upon by good Words, and external shews, and false Professions; so neither by any external Relation to him; For many shall come from the East, and from the West, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of God, but the Children of the

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King-

 Kingdom shall be cast out into utter Darkness.  
Vol. VI. *ness.*

And however Men may bear up themselves *now* upon their worldly Greatness and Power, certainly there is *a time a coming*, when the greatest Persons in the World, those who overturn Kingdoms, and lay waste Countries, and oppress and ruin Millions of Mankind for the gratifying of their own Lusts and Ambition, I say there is *a Day coming*, when even *these*, as much, nay more than others, shall fear and tremble before *the impartial Justice* of God. Rev. 6. 15. *And the Kings of the earth, and the great Men, and the rich Men, and the chief Captains, and the mighty Men, and every Bond-man, and every Free-man hid themselves in the Dens, and in the Rocks of the Mountains; for the great Day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand? The impartial Justice* of God will treat the greatest and the meanest Persons alike, Rev. 20. 12. *I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books,*  
accord-

according to their works. All judged according to their Works.  Vol. VI.

I should next proceed to vindicate the Justice of God in the Distribution of Rewards and Punishments from those Objections, which seem to impeach it. But before I enter upon this, it will be convenient to satisfy one question, which hath occasioned great disputes in the World, and that is, how far Justice, especially as to the Punishment of Offenders is essential to God? And for the clearing of this matter I shall briefly lay down these Propositions.

*First*, I take this for a certain and undoubted Truth, that every *Perfection* is essential to God, and cannot be imagined to be separated from the Divine Nature, because this is the Natural Notion which Men have of God, that he is a Being that hath all Perfection.

*Secondly*, The actual constant exercise of those Divine Perfections, the effects whereof are *without himself*, is not essential to God. For instance, tho' God be essentially powerful, and good; yet it is not necessary, that he should always exercise his Power and Goodness; but at such times, and in such a manner,

as seems best to his *Wisdom*; and this Vol. VI. is likewise true of his *Wisdom* and *Justice*, because *these* are Perfections, the effects whereof are terminated upon something *without himself*.

*Thirdly*, It is *essential* to God to love Goodness, and hate Sin, wherever he sees them. It is not necessary there should be a World, or reasonable Creatures in it: but upon supposition that God makes such Creatures, it is agreeable to the Divine Nature, to give them good and righteous Laws, to encourage them in the doing of that which is good, and to discourage them from doing that which is evil, which cannot be done, but by *Rewards* and *Punishments*, and therefore it is agreeable to the Perfection of the Divine Nature, to reward Goodness, and to punish Sin.

*Fourthly*, As for those rewards which the Gospel promiseth, and the Punishments which it threatens, there is some difference to be made between the *rewarding* and *punishing justice* of God.

1. As for that abundant *reward* God is pleased to promise to good Men, the *promise* of it is founded in his *goodness*,  
and

and *the performance* of that promise in his *justice*; for it is *justice* to perform what he promises, tho' the *promise* of so great and abundant a reward was meer *goodness*.

2. As for the *punishing justice* of God, about which hath been the great Question, whether *that* be *essential* to God or not, it seems very plain, that it is not *necessary* that God should inflict those judgments which he threatens, *because* he hath threatned them; for there is not the like obligation upon Persons to perform their threatnings, that there is to perform their promises; because God by his *promise* becomes a *Debtour* to those, to whom he makes the promise; but when he *threatens*, he is the *Creditor*, and we are Debtors to his Justice; and as a *Creditor*, he may remit the Punishment which he hath threatned: But then if we consider God as *loving goodness* and *hating Sin*; if we look upon him as *Governor of the World*, and concerned to preserve good Order, to encourage Holiness and Righteousness, and to discountenance Sin, under this consideration it is *essential* to him to *punish Sin* at such times, and in such man-



ner and circumstances, as seems best to  
 Vol. VI. his *Wisdom*.

And I am not at all moved by that, which is urged by some learned Men to the contrary, that if *punishing justice* were *essential* to God, then he must punish the Sinner *immediately*, so soon as he hath offended, and to the *utmost* of his Power; because whatever Acts *naturally*, Acts *necessarily*, and to the *utmost*: for I do not suppose *such a justice* essential to God as Acts *necessarily*, but *such a justice*, which as to the time, and manner, and circumstances of its Acting is regulated and determined by his *Wisdom*; and there is the same Reason likewise of his *goodness*.

I come now to the Objections which are taken partly from the dispensations of God in *this* World; and partly from the punishments of *the other*.

*First*, As to the dispensations of God in *this* World, there are these *two* things Objected against the *justice* of the Divine Providence.

I. The *inequality* of God's dealings with good and bad Men in this World.

II. The *translation* of Punishments, punishing one Man's Sin upon another,  
 as

as the Sins of the Fathers upon the Children, of the Prince upon the People. Vol. VI.  
I begin with the

I. Objection, the *inequality* of God's dealing with good and bad Men in this World. In this life things happen promiscuously, *there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked*; if the Wicked suffer and are afflicted, so are the Righteous; if the Righteous sometimes flourish, so do the Wicked; and is not this *unjust*, that those who are so unequal as to their Deserts should be equally dealt withal? or if there be any inequality, it is usually the wrong way, the Wicked do many times prosper more in the World, and the Righteous are frequently more afflicted. This was the great Objection of old against the Providence of God, which the Heathen Philosophers took so much pains to answer, nay it did often shake the faith of Holy and Good Men in the old Testament. *Job 12. 6. The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure, into whose hand God bringeth abundantly.* and chap. 21. 7, 8, 9. he Expostulates the same matter again; and *David* says this was a great stumbling-Block to him, *Psal. 73. 2, 3.*  
and

Vol. VI. and the like we find in the Prophets, *Jer.* 12. 1. and *Hab.* 1. 13. This Objection I have else-where considered, I shall now very briefly offer two or three Things, which I hope will be sufficient to break the force of it.

1. It must be granted, that it is not necessary to *justice* to shew it self *immediately*, and to dispence Rewards and Punishments so soon as there are Objects for them. This is not thought necessary among Men, much more ought we to leave it to the Wisdom of God to determine the time and circumstances of the exercising of his Justice; and we are not to conclude that the Providence of God is unjust, if he do not bestow rewards, and inflict Punishments, just when we think he should.

2. If God intended this Life for a State of Tryal, wherein he would prove the obedience of Men, and their free inclination to good or evil, it is not reasonable to expect that he should follow Men with present Rewards and Punishments; for that would lay too great a force upon Men, so that there would hardly be any opportunity of *trying* them; but on the contrary, there is all the Reason in the World to presume that  
God

God should exercise the Graces and Virtues of good Men with afflictions and sufferings, and suffer bad Men to take their Course for a while, and walk in their own ways, without continual Checks by frequent and remarkable Judgments upon them, so often as they offend.

3. If there be another Life after this, wherein Men shall be Judged according to their works, then this Objection vanisheth, for that great Day will set all things straight, which seem now to be so Crooked and Irregular. The deferring of Rewards and Punishments to the most convenient Season, is so far from being a reflection upon the justice of God, that it is highly to the commendation of it. What *Claudian* says of *Ruffinus*, a very bad Man, whose long impunity had tempted Men to call in question the justice of God, is considerable in this Case;

*Abstulit hunc tandem Ruffini pœna tumultum,  
Absolvitque Deos.*

“The Punishment which overtook  
“him at last, did quiet those tumultuous  
“thoughts,

Vol. VI. "thoughts, and absolved the gods  
 "from all blame. When Men look but a  
 little way, and consider only the pre-  
 sent state of Things, they are ready  
 to quarrel at the Justice of them ; but if  
 they would look at the end of Things,  
 and have Patience to stay till the last,  
 to see the Conclusion and Winding up  
 of things, they would then acquit God  
 in their thoughts from all those impu-  
 tations of injustice, which from the  
*inequality* of present dispensations, rash  
 and inconsiderate Men are apt to charge  
 him withal.

II. Objection, from the *translation*  
 of Punishments, the punishing of one  
 Man's Sin upon another, as of *the Fa-  
 thers upon the Children*, which God  
 threatens in the *second Commandment*,  
 and did in some sort fulfil in *Ahab*, in  
*bringing the evil he had threatned him  
 withal, in his Son's Days*, 1 Kings 21. 19.  
 The punishing the Sin of one Person  
 upon a People, as that of *Achan* upon  
 the whole Congregation, *Josh. 22. 20.*  
*Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a  
 trespass in the accursed thing? and wrath  
 fell on all the congregation of Israel, and  
 that man perished not alone in his iniquity.*  
 And the Sin of *David* upon the Peo-  
 ple,



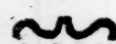
ple, 2 Sam. 24. When seventy thousand  
Dyed of the Plague, for David's Sin in  
numbring the People. Now how is  
this agreeable to justice? is it not a known  
Rule, *Noxa caput sequitur*, Mischief  
pursues the Sinner? What can be more  
reasonable, *Quam ut peccata suos teneant*  
Authores, Than that Men's faults should  
be charged upon the Authors, and Punish-  
ment fall upon the guilty?

For answer to this.

1. It is not unreasonable that one Man  
should bear the punishment of another's  
Fault, if he be willing and content to  
bear it, *Volenti non fit injuria*, There is  
no wrong done to those, that are willing  
to undergo it, tho' they be innocent, which  
was the case of our Blessed Saviour  
suffering for us, *the just for the unjust*,  
as the Scripture expresseth it.

2. Where the Person, upon whom  
the punishment is transfer'd, is likewise  
a sinner, and obnoxious to God, there  
can be no injustice; because he hath de-  
served it upon his own account, and God  
may take what occasion he pleaseth to  
punish them that deserve to be punisht.

3. In punishing the iniquity of *the*  
*Father upon the Children*, the guilty Per-  
son, that is, *the Father*, is punisht in the  
Calamity

Vol. VI.  Calamity of *his Children*, for a Man's *Children* are *himself Multiplied*; and therefore it is very remarkable that in the *second Commandment*, God promiseth to shew mercy to thousands of Generations of them that love him; but he visits the iniquities of the Fathers upon the Children, but to the third and fourth Generation, that is so far as a Man may live to see them punisht, and suffer in their Punishment.

4. As to the Punishment of the People for the sins of their *Princes* and *Governors*, and one part of a community for another, supposing all of them to be *Sinners*, which is the true case, God may lay the punishment where he pleaseth; and there is no more injustice then when a Man is whipt on the Back for the theft which his hand committed, a community being one Body; besides the Prince is punisht in the loss of his People, the glory of a King consisting in the Multitude of his Subjects.

The Objection with respect to the other World, the punishment of temporal Evils with *Eternal*, is else-where answer'd.

The use we should make of this whole Discourse is,

*First,*

*First*, If God be *Just* and *Righteous*,  
let us acknowledge it in all his dispensations, even in those, the Reason whereof is most hidden and obscure. *Neh. 9. 33.* Speaking of the great afflictions that had befall'n God's own People, yet this he lays down as a firm Principle, *howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us.*

*Secondly*, This is matter of terrour to wicked Men. God doth *now* exercise his *milder* Attributes towards Sinners, his *Mercy*, and *Patience*, and *Goodness*; but if we despise these, that *terrible* Attribute of his *Justice* will display it self; and thus the Scripture describes in a severe manner, *the Lord revengeth, and is jealous; the Lord will take vengeance on his Adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his Enemies.*

*Thirdly*, This is matter of comfort to good Men, that the *Righteous* God *Governs* the World, and will judge it. *The Lord reigneth, let the earth rejoyce, Psal. 97. 1.* And he gives the Reason of it in the next *v. Righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his Throne.* Tho' he be *omnipotent*, we need not fear; for his *Power* is always under the conduct of *Eternal Righteousness.*

*Fourthly*,

  
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*Fourthly*, Let us imitate this *righteousness*, let us endeavour *to be righteous as he is righteous*; let us give to God the Love, Reverence, and Obedience which are due to him; and in all our dealings, what is *just* and due to Men. This Duty hath an *immutable* Reason, founded in the Nature of God.

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SERMON

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# SERMON XII.

The Truth of God.

DEUT. XXXII. 4.

— *A God of Truth.*

**I**N speaking to this Attribute, I shall

I. Shew you what we are to understand by the *Truth* of God.

II. Endeavour to prove that this Perfection belongs to God, that he is a *God of Truth*.

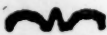
III. Answer some Objections that may be made against it; and then make some *Use* of it.

I. What we are to understand by the *Truth* of God. I shall take it as the Scripture useth it in a large Sense, so as

Z

to



Vol. VI.  to include not only the *veracity* of God ; but his *Faithfulness*. Hence it is that in Scripture *Truth* and *Faithfulness* are so often put together, and frequently put one for another, *Isa. 25. 1. Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.* *Rev. 21. 5. These words are true and faithful.* And the *Faithfulness* of God, in performing his *Promises*, is frequently call'd his *Truth*. And because the Scripture useth them promiscuously, we need not be very solicitous to find out distinct Notions of them ; but if you will, they may be distinguish'd thus ; the *truth* or *veracity* of God hath place in every *Declaration* of his Mind ; the *Faithfulness* of God only in his *Promises*.

For the *First*, The *veracity* or *truth* of God ; this hath place in every *Declaration* of his Mind, and signifies an exact Correspondence and Conformity between his *Word* and his *Mind*, and consequently between his *Word* and the *truth* and *reality* of *Things*. The Correspondence of his *Word* with his *Mind*, depends upon the *rectitude* of his *Will* ; the conformity of his *Word* with the *reality* of *Things*, not only upon the *rectitude* of his *Will*, but the *Perfection* of his *Knowledge*, and the *infallibility* of his

Under-

*Understanding*; so that when we say God is *true*, or *speaks Truth*, we mean thus, that his *Words* are a plain Declaration of his *Mind*, and a true representation of *Things*, in opposition to *Falsehood*, which is speaking otherwise than the *thing* is; and *Hypocrisie*, that is, speaking otherwise than we *think*. For instance, when God declares any *thing* to be so, or not to be so, to have been thus, or not to have been thus, the *thing* really is so, and he thinks so; when he expresseth his desire of any *thing*, he does really desire it; when he commands any *thing*, or forbids us any *thing*, it is really his *Mind* and *Will* that we should do what he *Commands*, and avoid what he forbids; when he declares and foretels any *thing* future, it really shall come to pass, and he really intended it should; if the Declaration be to be understood absolutely, it shall absolutely come to pass; if the Declaration be to be understood Conditionally, it shall come to pass, and he intends it shall, if the Condition be performed.

Secondly, The *Faithfulness* of God. This only hath place in his *Promises*, in which

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there is an Obligation of *Justice* superadded to his *Word*; for God by his Promise doth not only declare what he intends, and what shall be; but confers a right upon them to whom the promise is made, so as that the breach of his Promise would not only cast an imputation upon his *Truth*, but upon his *Justice*.

II. That this Perfection belongs to God. And this I shall endeavour to prove,

*First*, From the Dictates of *Natural Light*.

*Secondly*, From *Scripture*.

*First*, From the Dictates of *Natural Light*. *Natural Light* tells us, that *Truth* and *Faithfulness* are *Perfections*, and consequently belong to the Divine Nature; and that *False-hood* and a *Lie* are *Imperfections*, and to be removed from God. There is nothing that is amongst Men esteemed a greater contumely and reproach, than to give a Man the *Lie*, to call him a *Liar*, because it is an Argument of so much baseness, and of a low and mean and servile spirit; the usual Temptation to it being fear of losing some Advantage, or incurring

curing some danger. Hence was that saying, that *it is the property of a Slave to lie, but of a free Man to speak truth*: Now whatever argues baseness or imperfection, our Reason tells us is infinitely to be separated from the most Perfect Being. *God cannot be tempted with evil*, the Divine Nature being all-sufficient, can have no temptation to be otherwise than Good and Just, and True and Faithful. Men are tempted to Lie by advantage, and out of fear: but the Divine Nature hath the security of its fullness and all-sufficiency, that it cannot hope for any increase, nor fear any impairment of its Estate. Men are unfaithful, and break their Words, either because they are rash and inconsiderate in passing of them, or forgetful in minding them, or inconstant in keeping of them, or impotent and unable to perform them: but none of these are incident to God, his infinite Wisdom, and perfect Knowledge, and clear foresight of all Events, secure him both from inconsiderateness, and inconstancy, and forgetfulness; and his infinite Power renders him able to perform what he hath spoken, and to make good his Word. And that these are the *Natural*

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Dictates and Suggestions of our Minds, appears clearly from the reasonings of the Heathen in this matter, who were destitute of Divine Revelation. *Plato de Repub.* l. 2. lays down this as a certain Truth, "That lying and Falsehood are imperfections, and odious to God and Men, τὸ μὲν ψεύδος ἔμγονον ἀπὸ θεῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπ' ἀνθρώπων μισεῖται. And afterwards he tells us, "That the Divine Nature is free from "all Temptation hereto, either from "advantage or fear; ἔκ αὖ ἐστὶν ἔνεκα ἂν θεὸς ψεύδιτο; πάντα ἄρα ἀψευδὲς τὸ θεῖον; and Concludes, "Therefore God is true, and deals plainly with us, both in his Words and Actions, and is neither changed himself, nor deceives us. *Porphyrus* in the *Life of Pythagoras* tells us, "That "this was one of his Precepts, μάλιστα δ' ἀληθεύειν; τὸ γὰρ μόνον δύνασθαι τὸς ἀνθρώπους ποιῆν θεῶν περὶ ἀληθείας; and afterwards he adds, "that Truth is so great "a Perfection, that if God would render himself visible to Men, he would "chuse *Light for his body, and Truth for his Soul.*

Secondly,



Secondly, From Scripture. The Scripture doth very frequently attribute this to God, 2 Sam. 7. 28. *And now, O Lord God, thou art that God, and thy words be true*; Psal. 25. 10. *All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth*; Psal. 31. 5. *Into thy hand I commit my spirit: thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth*. Rev. 3. 7. *These things saith he, that is holy, he that is true*. Rev. 6. 10. *How long, O Lord, holy and true?* 15. 3. *Just and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints*. 16. 7. *True and righteous are thy judgments*. Hither we may refer those Texts which speak of the Plenty and Abundance of God's truth, Ex. 34. 6. *Abundant in goodness and truth*. Psal. 86. 15. *Plenteous in mercy and truth*; and those which speak of the Duration and Eternity of it. Psal. 100. 5. *And his truth endureth to all generations*. 117. 2. *And the truth of the Lord endureth for ever*. 146. 6. *Who keepeth truth for ever*.

As the Scripture doth attribute this Perfection to God, so it removes the contrary from him with the greatest abhorrence and detestation, Num. 23. 19. *God is not a Man that he should lie, neither the son of Man that he should repent, hath he said, and shall not he do it? hath he*

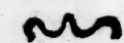
 *spoken, and shall he not make it good? They are Balaam's Words, but God put them into his Mouth. 1 Sam. 15. 29. The strength of Israel will not lie nor repent, for he is not a Man that he should repent. Rom. 3. 4. Yea let God be true, and every Man a Liar. Nay the Scripture goes further, does not only remove lying and false-hood and inconstancy from God, but speaks of these as things impossible to the Divine Nature; Tit. 1. 2. In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the World began. Heb. 6. 18. That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us.*

And the Scripture doth not only in general attribute this Perfection to God, but doth more particularly assure us of his *Sincerity* and *Truth* and *Faithfulness*. Of his *sincerity*; that he deals plainly with us, and speaks what he intends, that his Words are the image of his Thoughts, and a true representation of his Mind. God is very careful to remove this jealousy out of the Minds of Men, who are apt to entertain unworthy Thoughts of God, as if not-  
 withstanding


withstanding all that he hath declared, he had a secret design to ruin Men; therefore he interposeth his Oath for our greater assurance, *Ezek. 33. 11. As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way, and live.* When God speaks to us, he speaks his Mind, and hath no design to circumvent and possess us with Errour and Delusion; if he offer Life and Happiness, we may believe he is real, and that if he did not intend to bestow it upon us, or if there were no such thing as a future Glory, he would not have declared it to us; this was the temper of our Saviour, who was *the express image of the Father, full of Grace and Truth.* John 14. 2. *In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I wou'd have told you.*

And as the Scripture assures us of his Sincerity, so of his Truth and Faithfulness in the accomplishment of all his Predictions, and performance of all his Promises. As for the truth of his Predictions, and certain accomplishment of them, the Scripture frequently useth this Proverbial Speech, to assure us of the certainty of their accomplishment;

Hea-

 *Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. Mar. 24. 35. For the Faithfulness of God in his Promises, the Scripture makes frequent mention of it, Deut. 7. 9. Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy. Psal. 89. 33, 34. I will not suffer my faithfulness to fail, my covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing which is gone out of my lips. The Scripture doth record God's punctual and full performance of his Promises; particularly of that Promise to Abraham, after four hundred Years to bring the Children of Israel out of Egypt, and to give them the Land of Canaan for an Inheritance. Gen. 15. 13. the Punctual accomplishment you have recorded, Ex. 12. 41. And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty Years, even the self same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt; see likewise Jos. 21. 44, 45. and 23. 14. 1 Kings 8. 56. And upon this account it is that God is so frequently in Scripture styl'd the God that keepeth covenant. 1 Kings 8. 23. Neh. 1. 5. 9. 32. and in several other Places. And so likewise of Predictions of evil to come, God is*

true


in fulfilling his Word. 1 Sam. 15.  Vol. VI.  
 19. When the Prophet had threatned  
 Saul to rent the Kingdom from him, he  
 adds, *the strength of Israel will not lie nor*  
*repent, for he is not a Man that he should*  
*repent.*

III. I come to remove some Objecti-  
 ons that may be made against the *truth*  
 and *faithfulness* of God.

First, It is Objected against the *sincer-*  
*ity* of God and his *plain dealing*, that  
 he is sometimes represented in Scrip-  
 ture, as inspiring Prophets with false  
 Messages. 1 Kings 22. 20, &c. Jer. 4.  
 10. 20. 7. Ezek. 14. 9.

Ans. As to three of these Texts, it is  
 a known *Hebraism* to express things  
 in an *imperative* and *active* form, which  
 are to be understood only *permissively*. So  
 where *the Devil besought Christ, that he*  
*would suffer them to enter into the herd of*  
*Swine, he said unto them go,* Mat. 8. 31.  
 He did not command, but permit them.  
 And so *John 13. 27.* where our Savi-  
 our says to Judas, *what thou doest, do quick-*  
*ly,* we are not to understand, that he  
 commanded him to betray him, tho' that  
 seem to be express in the form. So like-  
 wise here, where an *evil spirit* offer'd  
 him-



 himself to be a *lying spirit in the mouth*  
 Vol. VI. of the Prophet, and God says go forth  
 and do so; this only signifies a per-  
 mission not a command. And so Jer. 4. 10.  
 where the Prophet complains that  
 God had greatly deceived the Pec-  
 ple, *saying they should have peace, when*  
*the sword reached to the Soul*; we  
 are to understand this no other-  
 wise, but that God permitted the false  
 Prophets to deceive them, by Prophe-  
 fying Peace to them, as appears by the  
 History. Ezek. 14. 9. *I the Lord have*  
*deceived that Prophet, that is permitted him*  
*to be deceived, and to deceive the People,*  
 as a just judgment upon them for their  
 Infidelity with respect to his true Pro-  
 phets. This he threatens at the 5th. v.  
*I will take the house of Israel in their own*  
*heart, because they are all estranged from me*  
*through their idols*; because they have  
 chosen to themselves false gods, I will  
 suffer them to be deceived with false  
 Prophets; and that this is the meaning,  
 appears by the threatening added, *and*  
*will stretch out my hand upon him, and*  
*will destroy him from the midst of my people*;  
 now God will not punish that whereof  
 he is the Author.

That

That Text Jer. 20. 7. *Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived*, signifies no more, but that he had mistaken the Promise of God to him, who when he gave him his Commission told him he would be with him, by which he understood that no evil should come to him, and now he was become a derision, and the people mocked him; and in his passion and weakness he breaks forth into this expression, *thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived*; whereas it was his own mistake of the meaning of God's promise, which was not that he should not meet with scorn, and opposition, and persecution, but that they should not prevail against him, as you may see at the latter end of the first Chapter.

Second Objection against the Faithfulness of God as to performance of his promise. 'Tis Objected that God did not give the Children of Israel all the land which he promised to Abraham, as will appear by comparing, Gen. 18. 19, 20. with Josh. 13. 1. &c. and Judg. 2. 20, 21. Gen. 15. 18. God promiseth to give Abraham and his seed such a Land, the bounds whereof he describes; Josh. 13. 1. 'Tis said there, that *there remained very much land yet unconquer'd*, which

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which they had not got the possession of. And *Judg. 2. 20.* 'tis said that the People having not performed their part of the Covenant, God would suspend the further performance of his Promise, and *would not drive out any more of the Nations before them*; and it is probable that the *Israelites* never were possessors of the promised Land in the full latitude and extent of the Promise.

*Ans.* This Covenant of God with *Abraham*, was upon consideration of his past Faith and Obedience, tho' it seems the full performance of it did likewise depend upon the future Obedience of his posterity; in pursuance of this Covenant, notwithstanding all the murmurings and rebellions of that People, God did bring them into the promised Land, tho' they provoked him to destroy them many a time; because he remembred his covenant with *Abraham*; when they were possessors of it, God gave them a title to the rest, and would have assisted them in the Conquest of it, if they had performed the Condition required on their part, that is, continued Faithful and Obedient to him, but they did not, and thereby discharged God from any further performance of his Promise;

Promise ; and God when he had done this, had fully performed the Covenant he made with *Abraham*, so far as concerned *his* part, as appears by the acknowledgment of *Joshua*, even in a time when a great part of the Land was unconquer'd, *Josb.* 21. 44. and of *Solomon*, 1 Kings 8. 56. yea and had it not been that God had made this Covenant, as well upon consideration of *Abraham's* Faith and Obedience, as upon Condition of the future Obedience of his Posterity, the Rebellions and Disobedience of the People in the Wilderness had released God wholly from the Promise, and he had not been unfaithful if *he had destroyed utterly that People, and made a full end of them*, and they had never entred into that Land, because a failure of the Condition doth make the Obligation to cease ; and that this Condition was imply'd in this Covenant with *Abraham*, appears by these Texts, *Deut.* 7. 12, 13. 11. 22. 23. 42. and *Judg.* 2. 20. God gives this Reason why he suspended the compleat performance of his Promise, *the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel, and he said, because that this People*  
hath

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*bath transgressed my Covenant which I commanded their Fathers, and have not harkned to my voice, I also will not henceforth drive out any of the Nations which Josbua left when he died,*

*Third Objection, God is not punctual in performing his Threatnings; as when he threatned Adam, Gen. 2. 17. In the day thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die; which yet was not accomlisht, for he lived many hundred Years after, God threatned Ahab to bring evil upon him and his family, 1 Kings 21. 21. But upon his Humiliation he is pleased to respite it, v. 29. So God threatned Hezekiah with Death, but upon his prayer adds fifteen Years to his Life. 2 Kings 20. Thus Nineveh was threatned, but upon their Repentance, God repented of the evil, Jon. 3. 10. Now how is this deferring and turning away of judgment consistent with the Truth of God? doth not this seem to charge him with false-hood or levity?*

*Ans.* This may be said in general, that every one that understands the Nature of God, cannot but be very well assur'd, that *false-hood* and *levity* are very far from God; and tho' he could

not



not untie some particular Knots, and answer all difficulties, yet he ought to rest satisfied in this assurance. I confess this Objection is troublesome, and requires a distinct Consideration. I will not be peremptory in nice matters, but I shall, with submission, offer these things in answer to it.

I. As for the expression of God's *repenting*, we are to understand it, as many others in Scripture, *after the manner of Men*, and spoken by way of *condescension* to our Weakness, and accommodated to our Capacities, and not as casting any imputation of *false hood* or *inconstancy* upon God, as if either he did not intend what he saith, or out of levity did alter his Mind. When God is said to *repent*, the expression only signifies thus much, that God *doth not execute* that which *seemed* to us to have been his purpose, that he is pleased to do otherwise than his threatnings *seemed openly to express*, because of some *tacit Condition* implied in them; and this doth not derogate either from the *truth*, or *sincerity*, or *constancy* of God in his Word. Not from his *truth*; for he speaks what he intends really, if something did nor intervene to prevent the

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Judg-

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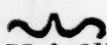
Judgment threatned, upon which he was resolv'd, when he threatned, to be taken off and stop his Judgments : Nor doth it derogate from his *sincerity* and *plainness* ; for he hath told us that his threatnings have such Conditions imply'd in them : Nor doth it derogate from the *constancy* and *immutability* of God ; because God doth not *mutare consilium sed sententiam*, he doth not change his counsel and purpose, but takes off the sentence, which he had past with reserved Conditions.

2. As to the Instances, that I may give more particular satisfaction to them, I shall Consider the threatnings of God with this double respect, either with relation to *Law*, or with relation to the *Event* ; with relation to a *Law*, as they are the *sanction* of it ; or with relation to the *Event*, as they are *Predictions* of something to come.

(1.) Some threatnings have only relation to a *Law*, as they are the *sanction* of it. And thus consider'd, they differ from *Promises* ; for *Promises* confer a *Right*, *omne promissum cadit in debitum* ; but a *threatning* doth not convey any *Right*, nor if forborn can the party complain of *Wrong* done to him ; and therefore

fore in this Case it can only signifie what the offence against the Law deserves, and what the offender may expect; for the end of threatning is not *Punishment*, but the *avoiding* of it. And this may answer the *first* Instance. God gave *Adam* a Law; and by way of *Sanction*, not of *Prediction* of an Event, he threatned the breach of it with Death: Now God did not execute the Punishment threatned at the time threatned, but deferr'd it, and this without any impeachment of his Justice or *Truth*, because this threatning was only the *Sanction of the Law*.

(2.) We may consider Threatnings with Relation to the *Event* and as *Predictions*; and as to the accomplishment of these, there seems to be a greater degree of Necessity, because the honour of God's *Knowledge*, and *Power*, and *Truth* seem to be concerned in them; for if his Word be not fulfill'd, it must either be for want of *Knowledge* to foresee Events, or *Power* to bring them to pass, or *Constancy* to his Word. Now if we consider Threatnings with respect to the *Event*, as they are *Predictions* of future *Judgements*, I think all the other Instances may be satisfied, by laying down this Rule for the understanding

 of them, *viz.* "That all Prophetical  
 Vol. VI. "Threatnings or Predictions of Judgment are to be understood with this  
 "tacit Condition, if there do not intervene the Humiliation, and Repentance, and Prayer of the Persons  
 "against whom the Judgment is threatened; and if so, God may upon Repentance, without any impeachment  
 "of the honour of his *Truth*, or  
 "Knowledge, or Power, either defer, or  
 "abate, or remit the Punishment. And that the *Predictions* of Judgments are to be understood with this Condition, appears clearly from that known Text,  
*Jer.* 18. 7, 8.

I come now to the last thing I proposed, to make some *Use* of this Doctrine.

*First*, If God be a *God of Truth*, then this gives us assurance that he doth not deceive us, that the Faculties which he hath given us are not false, but when they have clear perceptions of Things, they do not err and mistake. Were it not for the *veracity* of God, we might, for any thing we know, be under a constant Delusion; and no Man could demonstrate the contrary, but that this is our make and temper, and the very frame

frame of our Understandings, to be then  
most of all deceived, when we think  
our selves to be most certain; I say no  
Man could be assured of the contrary,  
but from hence, because *veracity* and  
*truth* is a *Divine Perfection*; and there-  
fore God cannot be the Author of Er-  
rour and Delusion. Therefore we may  
be assured, that the frame of our Under-  
standings is not a Cheat, but that our  
Faculties are true, and unless it be our  
own fault, we need not be deceived  
in things that are necessary to our Hap-  
piness.

*Secondly*, If God be a *God of Truth*,  
then there is Reason why we should  
believe and assent to whatever we are  
satisfied is revealed to us by God.  
A Divine Revelation is a sufficient  
ground for the most firm assent; for this  
very thing, that any thing is revealed by  
God, is the highest Evidence, and ought  
to give us the most firm assurance of  
the truth of it. Hence it is that the  
Word of God is call'd *the Word of truth*,  
yea and *truth it self*, John 17. 17. *Thy  
Word is truth.*

Therefore whoever entertains the  
criptures as the Word of God, and is  
satisfied of the Divine Authority of



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them, ought in Reason to believe every thing contained in them, yea tho' there be some things of which no reasonable account can be given, and which our Reason and Understanding cannot give us particular satisfaction in ; yet because we are satisfied that they are revealed by God *who cannot lie*, whose Knowledge is infallible, and whose Word is true, we ought upon this higher and superior Reason to yield a firm assent to the truth of them : if we do not, we dishonour this Perfection of God, and rob him of this essential property, his Veracity. 1 John 5. 10. *He that believeth on the Son of God, hath the witness in himself : he that believeth not God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.* As on the other hand, if we do believe what God hath revealed, we glorify this Perfection of his, and set our seal to his Veracity. So 'tis said of Abraham, Rom. 4. 20. *That he was strong in faith, giving glory to God.* And St. John the Baptist, speaking concerning our Saviour, saith, John 3. 33. *He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal, that God is true.*

Thirdly,

*Thirdly*, If God be a God of truth, and faithful in performing his Promise, then here is a firm Foundation for our Hope and Trust. If God have made any Promise, we may securely rely upon it, that it shall be made good; we may hold fast our hope without wavering, because he is faithful who hath promised, Heb. 10. 23. Hence it is that the Blessings of God's Covenant are call'd *sure mercies*, Isa. 55. 3.

We attribute much to the Word of a faithful Friend, and look upon the Promise of an honest Man as very good security; but Men may fail us when we rely upon them: but God is true, tho' all Men should prove Lyars. Men are fickle and mutable; but the Nature of God is fixt, he cannot fail those that trust in him. When God hath made any Promise to us, we may plead it with him, and urge him with his faithfulness. So we find David did, 2 Sam. 7. 25. &c.

Only we should be careful to perform the Condition which is required on our part, Heb. 4. 1. we should take heed lest a Promise being left us, any one should come short of it, by not performing the Condition; for that doth release

 and discharge him of the Promise, and  
 Vol. VI. *he is faithful, tho' he doth not perform*  
 what he promised, because he did not  
 promise but upon *Condition*; and this  
 seem to be the meaning of those Words,  
*2 Tim. 2. 13. If we believe not, yet he*  
*abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself.* He  
 said before, that if we perform the Con-  
 ditions required, God will bestow the  
 Blessings promised, *It is a faithful saying,*  
*for if we be dead with him, we also shall*  
*live with him; if we suffer, we also shall*  
*reign with him; but if we deny him, the*  
 Curse threatned will then take place, and  
*he will deny us; and God is not unfaith-*  
*ful in doing this, he does not deny himself.*

Now if we have such assurance, we  
 may trust him with our greatest Con-  
 cernments, and venture our Souls with  
 him, *Psal. 31. 5. Into thy hands I commit*  
*my spirit, O Lord God of truth.* We  
 should rely upon him, when there are  
 the greatest improbabilities of the ac-  
 complishment of his Promises. Thus did  
*Abraham, Rom. 4. 17. &c.*

This should also make us *patient in*  
*hope*; if a Promise be not speedily ac-  
 complisht, we should not be dejected  
 or disquieted. *David* challengeth him-  
 self upon this account, *Psal. 42. 11.*

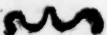
*Why*

Why art thou cast down, O my Soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God. And so likewise in reference to the Rewards of another World, tho' at a distance, yet we should, as the Apostle speaks, *wait for the blessed Hope.*

*Fourthly,* The Truth of God is matter of terrour to the Wicked. All the threatnings of temporal Evils may justly be expected, because their Sins deserve them, and there is no *Condition* implied in them, upon which thou canst reasonably hope for the avoiding or abating of the Evils threatned, but of *Humiliation* and *Repentance*, and if notwithstanding these threatnings thou continuest in thy Sins, and *blessest thy self*, saying, *I shall have peace, tho' thou walk in the imaginations of thy heart*, by this very thing thou provokest the Justice of God *not to spare thee*, and makest his wrath and his jealousy to *smoke against thee*; and if thou continuest impenitent, however he may defer the execution of temporal Evils, his Truth and *Veracity* is concerned to inflict eternal Punishments upon thee; for he

*bath*

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 hath sworn in his wrath that such shall no  
Vol. VI. enter into his rest.

*Fifthly*, Let us propound to our selves the *truth* of God for our pattern and imitation. Would you be like God? be *true* and *faithful*. *Truth* and *faithfulness* are *Divine Perfections*; but *lying* and *falsehood* are the Properties of the *Devil*, and the predominant qualities of *Hell*. The character of the Devil is, that he *abode not in the truth, and there is no truth in him, when he speaketh a lie, 'tis of his own, for he is a liar and the Father of it.* John 8. 44.

One of the first and most natural Notions that we have of Religion is, that it is *to imitate God*, and to endeavour to be like him, so far as we are capable; and to contradict any of the *Divine Excellencies and Perfections* is the highest Sin, because it is against the clearest Dictates of our Mind, and contrary to those Principles which are most deeply rooted in our Nature. No Man can be Cruel and Unmerciful, False and Treacherous, without a very high degree of guilt, because these Sins are contrary to the chiefest and most essential Perfections of God. *Lying* is a Sin that would fly in the Face of an Hea-  
then,



then, because it directly contradicts those Natural Notions which every Man hath of God and Religion; therefore we find that there is hardly any thing that Men are more ashamed of than *to be taken in a Lie*, and 'tis esteemed the highest reproach to be charged with it, it argues such a direct contrariety to that which is the Rule of Perfection, *the Nature of God*, and consequently so much imperfection and baseness. He that tells a Lie out of fear is at once bold towards God, and base towards Men.

Upon these accounts God expresseth himself highly offended with those that practise *Lying* and *False-hood*, and to have a detestation of them, *Pro. 12. 22. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.* It renders us unlike to him, *Eph. 4. 24, 25. Put on the new Man, which after God is created in Righteousness and true Holiness (or in the Holiness of truth.)* And from hence he infers, *Wherefore putting away lying, speak every Man truth with his Neighbour: for we are members one of another. Col. 3. 9. 10. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old Man with his deeds: And have put*  
on

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*on the new Man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him ; that is, because we profess to be conformed to the image of God. More particularly, we should charge our selves with truth and faithfulness towards God and Men.*


*I. Towards God, in our Oaths, and Vows, and Covenants. In our Oaths, when we swear in any Matter, we tell God that what we speak is Truth, and invoke him to bear Witness to it. To falsifie in an Oath is one of the most solemn affronts that we can put upon the God of Truth.*

And so in our *Vows*, which are a solemn Promise to God, of such things in which we have no precedent Obligation lying upon us. He that regardeth truth will neither be rash in making a Vow, nor careless to perform it. *Eccles. 5. 4. When thou vowest a vow to God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleasure in Fools.* Not to perform what we have vowed, is an Argument of Folly ; either of rashness in the making of it, or of inconstancy in not keeping it.

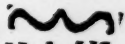
So likewise in all our *Covenants* with God, to serve him and obey him, and keep

keep his Commandments, we should strictly charge our selves with performance of these. There is a Natural Obligation upon us to these Things from the very Law of our Creation, tho' we should never solemnly make any such Promise, nor enter into any such Engagements, because it is a *tacit* Condition of our Beings ; but the taking of this *Covenant* solemnly upon us in *Baptism*, strengthens the Obligation, and makes our unfaithfulness the greater Sin. All our hopes of Happiness are founded in the Faithfulness of God ; and if thou be false to him, how canst thou expect he should be faithful to thee? 'Tis true indeed, that *he abides faithful, he cannot deny himself* ; but if thou hast any ingenuity in thee, this should be an Argument to thee to be faithful to him ; I am sure this can be no Encouragement to thee to be unfaithful ; for if thou breakest the Covenant thou hast entred into, and neglectest the Conditions upon which God hath suspended the performance of his Promise, thou dischargest the Obligation on his part.

2. *Towards Men* ; we should charge our selves with *Truth* in all our *Words*,  
and

 and *Faithfulness* in all our *Promises*.  
 Vol. VI. It becomes us who worship *the God of truth*, to speak truth; to use plainness and sincerity in all our Words, to abhor Falsehood and Dissimulation, and those more refined ways of lying by equivocation of Words, and secret reservations of our Minds on purpose to deceive. Those that plead for these, 'tis a sign they do not understand the Nature of God, and of Religion, which is to conform our selves to the Divine Perfections. We meet with many complaints in the old Testament, of the want of Truth and Faithfulness among Men, *Psal.* 12. 1. 2. *Isa.* 59. 13, 14, 15. *Jer.* 7. 2, 8, 9. 2. 4, 5, 6. *Hos.* 4. 1. I am afraid there is as much Reason for this complaint now; for we live in an Age of greater *Light*, which doth *reprove* and *make manifest* this *work of Darkneß*; and methinks there is no sadder sign of the decay of Christianity, and of the little power and influence that the Gospel hath upon us, than that there is so little regard had by Christians to these *Moral Duties*, which because *Moral* (however Men may slight that Word) are therefore of *Eternal* and *Indispensable* Obligation,

having

having their Foundation in the Nature of God.  Vol. VI.

To Conclude all, That Man that can dispence with himself as to *Moral Duties*, that makes no Conscience of *telling a Lie*, or *breaking his Word*, what Badge soever he may wear, what Title soever he may call himself by, it is as impossible that such a Man should be a *true Christian*, as it is to reconcile *the God of Truth*, and *the Father of Lies*.

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SERMON

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# SERMON XIII.

## The Holiness of God.

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*Be ye holy, for I am holy.*

IN speaking to this Attribute, I shall

I. Inquire, what we are to understand by the *Holiness* of God.

II. Endeavour to shew, that this Perfection belongs to God.

I. What we are to understand by the *Holiness* of God. There is some difficulty in fixing the proper Notion of it; for tho' there be no Property more frequently attributed to God in Scripture, than this of *Holiness*, yet there is

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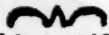
none

none of all God's Attributes, which  
 Vol. VI. Divines have spoken more sparingly of  
 than this.

The general Notion of *Holiness* is, that it is a *separation from a common and ordinary, to a peculiar and excellent use*. And this Notion of *Holiness* is applicable either to *Things* or *Persons*. To *Things*; thus the Vessels of the Tabernacle, and the Vestments of the Priests were said to be *holy*, because they were separated from common Use, and appropriated to the peculiar and excellent use of the service of God. *Holiness* of *Persons* is two-fold, either *Relative* and *External*, which signifies the peculiar Relation of a Person to God; such were call'd, *ἱερεῖς*, *Priests*, or *holy Men*: or else *Habitual* and *Inherent*; such is the *Holiness* of good Men. And it is a *separation from moral imperfection*, that is from *Sin* and *Impurity*. And this is call'd *ᾠσιον*; and the primary Notion of it is *Negative*, and signifies the absence and remotion of *Sin*: And this appears in those explications which the Scripture gives of it. Thus 'tis explain'd by opposition to *Sin* and *Impurity*, 2 Cor. 7. 1. *Let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness*

liness; where *Holiness* is opposed to all *filthiness*. Sometimes by the negation of Sin and Defilement: So we find *holy and without blame* put together, Eph. 1. 4. *Holy and without blemish*, Eph. 5. 27. *Holy, harmless, and undefiled*, Heb. 7. 26. 'Tis true indeed, this *Negative* Notion doth imply something that is *Positive*, it doth not only signify the absence of Sin, but a contrariety to it; we cannot conceive the absence of Sin without the presence of Grace; as take away crookedness from a Thing, and it immediately becomes straight. When ever we are made *Holy*, every Lust and Corruption in us is supplanted by the contrary Grace.

Now this *habitual Holiness* of Persons, which consists in a separation from Sin, is a conformity to the *Holiness* of God; and by this we may come to understand what *Holiness* in God is; and it signifies the peculiar eminency of the *Divine Nature*, whereby it is separated and removed at an infinite distance from moral Imperfection, and that which we call Sin; that is, there is no such thing as Malice, or Envy, or Hatred, or Revenge, or Impatience, or Cruelty, or Tyranny, or Injustice, or False-hood, or

  
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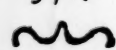
Unfaithfulness in God ; or if there be any other Thing that signifies Sin, and Vice, and moral Imperfection, *Holiness* signifies that the Divine Nature is at an infinite distance from all these, and possesseth of the contrary Perfections.

Therefore all those Texts that remove Moral Imperfection from God, and declare the repugnancy of it to the Divine Nature, do set forth the *Holiness* of God. *Jam.* 1. 13. *God cannot be tempted with evil.* *Job* 8. 3. *Doth God pervert Judgment, or doth the Almighty pervert Justice?* *Job* 34. 10, 12. *Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. Yea surely God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment.* *Rom.* 9. 14. *Is there then unrighteousness with God?* *God forbid.* *Zeph.* 3. 5. *The just Lord is in the midst thereof, he will not do iniquity. And so falsehood, and unfaithfulness, and inconstancy,* *Deut.* 32. 4. *A God of truth, and without iniquity.* *1 Sam.* 15. 29. *The strength of Israel will not lie.* *Tit.* 1. 2. *In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie hath promised.* *Heb.* 6. 18. *That by two immutable things,*



in which it was impossible for God to lie. Therefore you shall find, that *Holiness* is joyned with all the *Moral Perfections* of the Divine Nature, or put for them. *Hos.* 11. 9. *I am the holy one in the midst of thee*; that is, the merciful one. *Psal.* 145. 17. *The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* *Rom.* 7. 12. *The commandment is holy, and just, and good.* *Rev.* 3. 7. *These things saith he that is holy, he that is true.* *Rev.* 6. 10. *How long, O Lord, holy and true?* *Psal.* 105. 42. *He remembred his holy promise*; holy, that is, in respect of the faithfulness of it. *Isa.* 55. 3. *The sure mercies of David*; τὰ ὅσια, the holy mercies of David, which will not fail.

So that the *Holiness* of God is not a particular, but an *universal* Perfection, and runs through all the *moral Perfections* of the Divine Nature, 'tis the Beauty of the Divine Nature, and the Perfection of all his other Perfections. Take away this, and you bring an universal stain and blemish upon the Divine Nature; without *Holiness* Power would be Oppression; and Wisdom, Subtilty;

 and Sovereignty Tyranny ; and  
 Vol. VI. Goodness, Malice and Envy ; and  
 Justice, Cruelty ; and Mercy, Fool-  
 ish Pity ; and Truth, False-  
 hood : And therefore the Scripture  
 speaks of *this*, as God's highest Excel-  
 lency and Perfection. God is said to  
 be *glorious in Holiness*. Ex. 15. 11.  
*Holiness* is call'd *God's throne*. Psal. 47.  
 8. *He sitteth upon the throne of his ho-  
 liness*. This is that which makes Hea-  
 ven, Isa. 63. 15. It is called, *The  
 habitation of his holiness, and of his  
 glory* ; as if this were the very Na-  
 ture of God, and the sum of his  
 Perfections. The Knowledge of God  
 is called *the Knowledge of the holy  
 one*. Pro. 9. 10. *To be made partak-  
 ers of a Divine Nature, and to be  
 made partakers of God's holiness*, are  
 equivalent Expressions. 2 Pet. 3. 4.  
 Heb. 12. 10. And because there  
 is no Perfection of God greater,  
 therefore he is represented as swear-  
 ing by this, Psal. 60. 6. *God hath  
 spoken in his holiness*. Psal. 89. 35.  
*Once have I sworn by my holiness*. The  
 Angels and glorified Spirits they  
 sum up the Perfections of God in  
 this

this, *Isa. 6. 3. And one cried unto another, and said, holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory. Rev. 4. 8. And they rest not day and night, saying, holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.* There is no Attribute of God so often repeated as *this*; in some Copies it is nine times.

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II. I shall endeavour to prove that this Perfection belongs to God;

*First, From the Light of Nature.*

The Philosophers in all their Discourses of God agree in this, that whatever sounds like Vice and Imperfection, is to be separated from the Divine Nature; which is, to acknowledge his *Holiness*. *Plato*, speaking of our likeness to God, saith, ὁμοίως δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι. *Dan. 4. 9.* King *Nebuchadnezzar* calls God by this Title, *I know that the spirit of the holy Gods is in thee.* In a Word, whatever hath been produced to prove any of God's *Moral Perfections* proves his *Holiness*.

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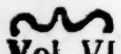
Secondly, From Scripture. There is no Title more frequently given to God in Scripture, and so often ingeminated, as this of his *Holiness*. He is called *Holiness* it self, *Isa.* 63. 15. Where *Heaven* is call'd *the habitation of his Holiness*, that is, of God. His Name is said to be *Holy*, *Luke* 1. 49. *And holy is his name*. He is called *the holy one*, *Isa.* 40. 25. *The holy one of Israel.* *Isa.* 41. 20. *The holy one of Jacob.* 49. 23. He is said to be *holy in all his Works and Promises.* *Psal.* 105. 42. *In all his ways and works,* *Psal.* 145. 17. This Title is given to each of the three Persons in the Blessed Trinity. To God the Father in innumerable Places: To God the Son, *Dan.* 9. 24. *To anoint the most holy.* The Devil cannot deny him this Title, *Luke* 4. 34. *I know thee who thou art, the holy one of God:* And the Spirit of God hath this Title constantly given it, *the holy Ghost*, or *the holy Spirit*, or *the Spirit of Holiness*. The Scripture attributes this Perfection in a peculiar manner to God, *1 Sam.* 2. 2. *There is none holy as the Lord.* *Rev.* 15. 4. *For thou only art holy.*

*holy.* Holiness is a communicable Perfection; but no Creature can partake of it in such a manner and degree as the Divine Nature possesseth it. God is eternally Holy, the Fountain of Holiness: the Creatures are derivatively and by participation Holy. God is eminently and transcendently so: the Creatures in a finite Degree. God is immutably so, 'tis impossible it should be otherwise: but no Creature is out of an absolute possibility of Sin. In this sense it is said, *Job 4. 18. That he putteth no trust in his Saints, and his Angels he chargeth with folly,* And Chap. 15. 15. *He putteth no trust in his Saints, and the Heavens are not pure in his sight.* From all which I shall draw these inferences.

1. If *Holiness* be a Perfection of the Divine Nature, and a Property of God, if in the Notion of God, there be included an everlasting separation and distance from Moral Imperfection, an eternal repugnance to Sin and Iniquity; from hence we may infer, that there is an *intrinsic good and evil* in Things, and the Reasons and Respects of *moral good*

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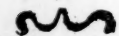


 *good and evil* do not depend upon  
 Vol. VI. any mutable, and inconstant, and  
 arbitrary Principle, but are fixt  
 and immutable, eternal and indis-  
 pensable. Therefore they do not  
 seem to me to speak so safely, who  
 make the Divine *Will*, precisely and  
 abstractedly consider'd, the *Rule* of  
*Moral good and evil*, as if there were  
 nothing good or evil *in its own Na-*  
*ture* antecedently to the *Will* of God,  
 but that all things are therefore  
 good or evil, because God *Wills*  
 them to be so; for if this were so,  
 Goodness, and Righteousness, and  
 Truth, and Faithfulness would not  
 be essential, and necessary, and im-  
 mutable Properties of the Divine  
 Nature, but accidental, and arbitra-  
 ry, and uncertain, and mutable;  
 which is to suppose that God, if he  
 pleased, might be otherwise than  
 good, and just, and true. For if these  
 depend meerly upon the *Will* of God,  
 and be not *necessary* and *essential* Pro-  
 perties of the Divine Nature, then  
 the contrary of these, Malice, and  
 Envy, and Unrighteousness, and  
 False-hood do not imply any essen-  
 tial

trial repugnancy to the Divine Nature; which is plainly contrary to what the Scripture tells us, that *God cannot be tempted with evil*, that *'tis impossible he should lie*, that he *cannot be* unrighteous. Vol. VI.

If any Man say that God hath now declared himself to be Just, and Good, and Faithful, and now he cannot be otherwise, because *he is a God of Truth, and he changeth not*, this is to grant the thing; for this supposeth the *veracity* and *immutability* of God to be *essential* and *necessary* Perfections of the Divine Nature; and why not *justice* and *goodness* as well? I say it supposeth *veracity* and *immutability* to be *essential* Perfections, and not to depend upon the *Will* of God, that is, that God cannot *Will* to be otherwise than true and unchangeable; for if he could, what assurance can we possibly have, but that when he declares himself to be good and just, he is or may be otherwise.

But I need not insist upon this, which seems to be so very clear, and to carry its own Evidence along

 Vol. VI. long with it. I will only use this Argument to prove it, and so leave it. No Being can *Will* its own *Nature* and *essential Perfections*, that is, chuse whether it will be thus or otherwise; for that were to suppose it to be before it is, and before it hath a Being, to deliberate about its own Nature. Therefore if this be *the Nature* of God, (which I think no body will deny) to be *good*, and *just*, and *true*, and *necessarily* to be what he is; then *goodness*, and *justice*, and *truth*, do not depend upon the *Will* of God, but there are such Things, such Notions antecedently to any Act of the Divine Will. And this does no ways prejudice the *Liberty* of God; for this is the highest Perfection to be *necessarily* Good, and Just, and True; and a Liberty or Possibility to be otherwise is impotency and imperfection. For Liberty no where speaks Perfection, but were the Things and Actions about which 'tis conversant are indifferent; in all other things, 'tis the highest Perfection not to be free and indifferent, but immutable

ble and fixt, and necessarily bound up by the eternal Laws of Goodness, and Justice, and Truth, so that it shall not be possible to swerve from them; and this is the *Perfection* of the *Divine Nature*, which we call his *Holiness*.

2. If *Holiness* be the chief Excellency and Perfection of the Divine Nature, this shews us what account we are to make of Sin, and Wickedness, and Vice. We may judge of every Privation by the Habit, for they bear an exact Proportion one to another. *Light* and *Darkness* are opposed, as Habit and Privation; if *Light* be pleasant and comfortable, then *Darkness* is dismal and horrid. And so *Holiness* and *Sin* are opposed; if *Holiness* be the highest Perfection of any Nature, then *Sin* is the grand Imperfection and the lowest Debasement of any Being; because it is the most opposite to *that*, and at the furthest distance from *that* which is the first Excellency and Perfection.

This should rectifie our Judgment and Esteem of Things and Persons.

We

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We admire and esteem Riches, and Power, and Greatness ; and we scorn and contemn Poverty, and Weakness, and Meanness ; yea Grace and Holiness, if it be in the Company of these. We are apt to reverence and value the Great, and the Rich, and the Mighty of this World, tho' they be Wicked ; and *to despise the poor Man's Wisdom and Holiness ;* but we make a false Judgment of Things and Persons. There is nothing that can be a Foundation of respect, that ought to command our Reverence and esteem, but real Worth and Excellency and Perfection ; and according to the Degrees of this, we ought to bestow our Respect and raise our Esteem. What St. James saith of *respect of Persons*, I may apply in this Case, *Jam. 2. 4. Are ye not then partial in your selves, and become judges of evil thoughts ?* We are extremely *partial*, we make a false Judgment, and Reason ill concerning Things, when we admire gilded Vices, and Wickedness exalted to high Places ; I mean ungodly rich Men, and ungodly great



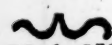
great men ; for wicked Men they are properly ungodly, unlike to God ; and when we contemn poor, and mean, and afflicted Holiness, and Piety. Were but our Eyes open, and our Judgment clear and unprejudic'd, we should see a beauty and resplendency in Goodness : even when it is under the greatest disadvantage, when it is cloathed with Raggs, and sits upon a Dunghill, it would shine through all these Mists, and we should see a Native Light and Beauty in it, throw the darkness of a poor and low Condition: And we should see Wickedness to be a most vile and abject thing, when it appears in all its gallantry and bravery ; we should look upon the poor *righteous* Man, as *more excellent than his Neighbour* ; and the prophane Gallant, as the *off-scouring of the Earth*. We should value a Man that *does justice, and loves mercy, and speaks the Truth to his Neighbour* ; we should esteem any one more upon the Account of any one of these simple Qualities, then we would another Man, destitute of these, upon the account of

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 Vol. VI. of a Hundred Titles of Honour,
 and Ten Thousand Acres of Land. A
 Wicked and Unholy Man, he is
 a vile Person, who deserves to be
 contemned; and a holy man he is the
 right honourable. Psal. 15. 4. In
 whose Eyes a vile Person is contemned;
 but he honoureth them that fear the
 Lord. The vile person is opposed to
 him that fears the Lord. He that is
 bold to affront God, and sin against
 him, is the base and ignoble Person.
 God himself, who is possessor of all
 Excellency and Perfection, and
 therefore knows best how to judge
 of these, he tells us, how we should
 value our selves and others, Jer. 9.
 23, 24. Let not the wise man glory
 in his wisdom, neither let the mighty
 man glory in his might; let not the
 rich man glory in his riches. But let
 him that glorieth, glory in this, that
 he understandeth and knoweth me, that
 I am the Lord, which exercise loving-
 kindness, judgment, and righteousness
 in the earth: for in these things I
 delight, saith the Lord. To know
 these Divine Qualities and Perfe-
 ctions, signifies here, to understand
 them

them so as to imitate them. I do not speak this to bring down the value of any that are advanced in this World, or to lessen the respect which is due to them; I would have nothing undervalued, but Wickedness and Vice; and I would have those who have store of worldly Advantages to recommend them, to add *Religion* to their *Riches*, and *Holiness* to their *Honour*, that they may be current for their *intrinsic* value, rather than for the *Image* and *Picture* of worth which the World hath stampt upon them.

3. If *Holiness* be the Chief Excellency and Perfection of the Divine Nature, then what an absurd and unreasonable thing is it, to scorn and despise *Holiness*, to mock and deride men under this very Title! The World is much blinded, that they do not see the great *Evil* of *Sin*, and the *Beauty* and *Excellency* of *Holiness*; but that Men should be so infatuated, as to change the nature of things, and to mistake things of so vast difference,

 as *sin* and *Holiness*; to call Good evil,
 Vol. VI: and evil Good; that *sin*, which is
 the vilest thing in the World, should
 be esteemed and cherish'd, and ac-
 counted a piece of gallantry, and
 reckon'd amongst the excellencies
 and accomplishments of Humane
 Nature; and *Holiness*, which is so
 great a Perfection, should be a Name
 of hatred and disgrace, to be con-
 temned and persecuted; that that
 which is the Glory of Heaven, and the
 most radiant Perfection of the Di-
 vine Nature, should be matter of
 scorn and contempt, as the Apostle
 speaks in another case, *Behold!*
ye Despisers, and wonder, and perish.
 Do ye think the Holy and Just
 God will put up these Affronts,
 and Indignities? Ye do not only
 despise *men*, but ye despise God also.
 You cannot condemn that which
 God accounts *his glory*, without re-
 viling the Divine Nature, and of-
 fering despite to God himself. The
 malice reacheth Heaven, and is le-
 vel'd against God, whenever ye
 slight *Holiness*.

4. If God be a *Holy* God, and
 hath

hath such a repugnancy in his Nature to sin, then this is matter of terror to wicked Men. The Holy God cannot but hate sin, and be an Enemy to wickedness; and the hatred of God is terrible. We dread the hatred of a great Man, because where hatred is back'd with power, the Effects of it are terrible. But the Hatred of the Almighty and Eternal God, is much more dreadful, because the Effects of it are greater, and more lasting, than of the hatred of a weak mortal man. We know the utmost they can do, *they can but kill the body; after that, they have no more that they can do*; they cannot hurt our Souls; they cannot follow us beyond the Grave, and pursue us into another World: But the Effects of God's Hatred and Displeasure are mighty and lasting, they extend themselves to all Eternity; for who knoweth the Power of his Anger? Who can tell the utmost of what Omnipotent Justice can do to sinners? *It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*; be-

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cause he that *lives for ever*, can *punish for ever*. We are miserable, if God do not love us. Those words, *my soul shall have no pleasure in him*, signifie great misery, and expresse a dreadful Curse: but it is a more positive Expression of misery, for God *to hate us*; that signifies Ruin and Destruction to the utmost. *Psal. 5. 4, 5. Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee.* This is a *paradox*, and expresseth less than is intended. God is far from being of an indifferent negative Temper towards sin and wickedness; therefore the Psalmist adds, *thou hatest all the workers of iniquity*; and then in the next *verse*, to shew what is the effect of God's Hatred, *thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing*. Therefore Sinner, fear and tremble at the thoughts of God's *Holiness*.

5. Imitate the *Holiness* of God; this is the Inference here in the Text, *be ye holy; for I am holy. Holiness*, in one word, contains all the imitable Perfections of God; and when it is said, *be ye holy*, 'tis as much as if he

he had said, be ye Good, and Patient, and Merciful, and True, and Faithful; for I am so. Therefore Religion is call'd the *knowledge of the holy one*, Prov. 9. 10. and Chap. 30. 3. And our imitation of God is exprest by *our putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*, Eph. 4. 24. Seeing then this is the chief Excellency and Perfection of God, and the sum of all the Perfections which we are to imitate, and wherein we are to endeavour to be like God, let us conform our selves to the *holy* God; endeavour to be *habitually holy*, which is our conformity to the *Nature* of God; and *actually holy*, which is our conformity to the *Will* of God. I will not enlarge upon this, because I have prest the imitation of these particular Perfections, Goodness, Patience, Justice, Truth, and Faithfulness upon other Texts. I shall only mention *two* Arguments, to excite and quicken our Desires and Endeavour after *Holiness*.

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1. *Holiness* is an imitation of the highest Excellency and Perfection. *Holiness*, I told you, signifies a separation from Sin and Vice, and all moral Imperfection, and consequently, doth comprehend and take in all the moral Perfections of the Divine Nature, the Goodness, and Mercy, and Patience, and Justice, and Veracity, and Faithfulness of God; now these are the very *Beauty* and *Glory* of the Divine Nature. The first thing that we attribute to God, next to his *Being*, is his *Goodness*, and those other *Attributes* which have a necessary connexion with it; for his *Greatness* and *Majesty* is nothing else but the *Glory* which results from his *united Perfections*, especially from his Goodness, and those Perfections which are akin to it. Separate from God these Perfections which Holiness includes in it, and what would be left but an *Omnipotent Evil*, an Eternal Being infinitely Knowing, and infinitely able to do mischief? which is as plain and notorious a Contradiction, and as impossible a thing as can be imagin'd;


imagin'd; so that if we have any sparks of ambition in us, we cannot but aspire after *Holiness*, which is so great an Excellency and Perfection of God himself. There is a vulgar prejudice against *Holiness*, as if it were a poor mean thing, and below a great and generous Spirit; whereas *Holiness* is the only true greatness of Mind, the most genuine Nobility, and the highest gallantry of Spirit; and however it be despised by Men, it is of a Heavenly Extraction, and Divine Original. *Holiness* is the first part of the Character of *the wisdom that is from above*. Jam. 3. 17. *The wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easie to be entreated, full of mercy, and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisie.*

2. *Holiness* is an essential and principal ingredient of *Happiness*. *Holiness* is a state of Peace and Tranquillity, and the very frame and temper of *Happiness*; and without it, the Divine Nature, as it would be imperfect, so it would be miserable. If the Divine Nature were capa-

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pable of envy, or malice, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or injustice, or unfaithfulness, it would be liable to vexation and discontent, than which nothing can be a greater disturbance of *Happiness*: so that *Holiness* is necessary to our Felicity and Contentment; not only to the *happiness* of the next life, but to our present Peace and Contentment. If reasonable Creatures could be happy, as brute Beasts are in their degree, by enjoying their depraved Appetites, and following the Dictates of Sense and Fancy, God would not have bound us up to a *Law* and *Rule*, but have left us, as he hath done unreasonable Creatures, to satisfy our Lusts and Appetites, without check and control: but Angels and Men, which are reasonable Creatures, have the Notions of Good and Evil, of Right and Wrong, of Comeliness and Filthiness, so woven and twisted into their very Natures, that they can never be wholly defaced, without the ruine of their Beings; and therefore it is impossible that such Creatures should be

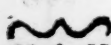
be happy otherwise, than by complying with these Notions, and obeying the natural Dictates and Suggestions of their Minds; which if they neglect, and go against, they will naturally feel remorse and Torment in their own Spirits; their Minds will be uneasie and unquiet, and they will be inwardly grieved and displeased with themselves for what they have done. So the Apostle tells us, *Rom. 1.* That even the most degenerate Heathens had *Consciences* which did *accuse or excuse them*, according as they obeyed, or did contrary to the dictates of Natural Light. God therefore, who *knows our frame*, hath so adapted his *Law* to us, which is *the rule of holiness*, that if we live up to it, we shall avoid the unspeakable torment of a guilty Conscience; whereas, if we do contrary to it, we shall always be at discord with our selves, and in a perpetual disquiet of Mind; for nothing can do contrary to *the Law of its Being*, that is, *to its own Nature*, without dis-

 displeasure and reluctancy, the
 Vol. VI. consequence of which, in *Moral*
Actions, is *Guilt*, which is nothing
 else, but the Trouble and Disquiet
 which ariseth in one's Mind, from
 conscioufness of having done some
 thing that contradicts the perfe-
 ctive Principle of his Being, that is
 something which did not become
 him, and which, being what he is,
 that is a *reasonable Creature*, he
 ought not to do.

So that in all *reasonable Creatures*
 there is a certain kind of *Temper*
 and *Disposition* that is *necessary* and
essential to Happiness, and that is *Holi-*
ness; which as it is the *Perfection*, so it
 is the great *Felicity* of the Divine
 Nature: And on the contra-
 ry, this is one chief part of the
 Misery of those wicked and ac-
 cursed Spirits the Devils, and of
 unholy Men, that they are of a
 temper contrary to God, they are
 Envious, and Malicious, and Wick-
 ed, that is, of such a temper as
 is naturally a Torment and Dis-
 quiet to it self; and here the
 foun-

foundation of Hell is laid in the evil disposition of our Spirits, and till *that* be cured, which can only be done by *Holiness*, 'tis as impossible for a wicked Man to be happy, and contented in himself, as it is for a Sick Man to be at ease; and the external presence of God, and a local Heaven would signifie no more to make a wicked Man happy and contented, than heaps of Gold, and Consorts of Musick, and a well spread Table, and a rich Bed, would contribute to a Man's ease in the paroxysms of a Feaver, or in a violent fit of the Stone. If a sensual, or covetous, or ambitious Man were in Heaven, he would be like *the rich Man in Hell*, he would be *tormented* with a continual *Thirst*, and burnt up in the Flames of his own ardent Desires, and would not meet with the least *drop* of suitable Pleasure and Delight, to *quench* and allay the Heat; the reason is, because such a Man hath *that* within him which torments him, and he cannot be at ease, till

Vol. VI.

Vol. VI  till *that* be removed. *Sin* is the violent and unnatural and uneasy State of our Soul, every wicked Man's Spirit is out of order, and till the Man be put into a right Frame by *Holiness*, he will be perpetually disquieted, and can have no rest within himself. The Prophet fitly describes the condition of such a Person, *Isa.* 57. 20, 21. *But the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt; there is no peace saith my God, to the wicked.* So long as a Man is unholy, so long as filthiness and corruption abound in his Heart, they will be restlessly working, like Wine which is in a perpetual motion and agitation, till it have purged it self of its Dregs and Foulness. Nothing is more turbulent and unquiet than the Spirit of a wicked Man; it is like *the Sea*, when it roars and rages through the strength of contrary Winds; it is the scene of furious Lusts and wild Passions, which as they are contrary to *Holiness*, so they maintain perpetual con-

contests and feuds among themselves.

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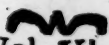
All Sin separates us from God, who is the Foundation of our Happiness. Our limited Nature, and the narrowness of our Beings, will not permit us to be happy in ourselves; it is peculiar to God to be his own Happiness; but Man, because he is finite, and therefore cannot be self-sufficient, is carried forth by an innate desire, of Happiness, to seek his Felicity in God. So that there is in the nature of man a Spring of restless Motion, which with great impatience forceth him out of himself, and tosses him to and fro, till he comes to rest in something that is self-sufficient. Our Souls, when they are separated from God, like *the unclean Spirit* in the Gospel, when it was cast out, they *wander up and down in dry and desert places, seeking rest, but finding none.* Were the whole World calm about a Man, and did it not make the least attempt upon him, were he free from the fears of Divine Vengeance; yet he could

not

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not be satisfied with himself, there is something within him that would not let him be at rest, but would tear him from his own Foundation and Consistency ; so that when we are once broken off from God, the sense of inward want doth stimulate and force us to seek our contentment else-where. So that nothing but *Holiness*, which re-unites us to God, and restores our Souls to their primitive and original state, can make us *happy*, and give peace and rest to our Souls. And this is the constant voice and language of Scripture, and the tenour of the Bible. *Acquaint thy self with God, that thou mayest be at Peace.* Job 22. 21. *Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart,* Psal. 97. 11. *The work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever,* Isa. 32. 17.

Seeing

Seeing then *Holiness* is so high a  *Perfection*, and so great a *Happiness*, Vol. VI.
let these Arguments prevail with
us, to aspire after this temper, that
as he who hath called us is holy, so we
may be holy in all manner of Conver-
sation, because it is written, be ye ho-
ly, for I am holy.

SERMON

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE Discourses of the *Divine Goodness*, being more than can be contain'd in this Volume, are, together with those of the remaining *Attributes*, reserv'd for the next: But to complete this, here follows a single Sermon upon another Subject.

SERMON XIV.

Of doing Good.

Being a Spital Sermon, Preach'd at
Christ-Church on Easter-Tuesday,
April 14th. 1691.

GALAT. VI. 9, 10.

*Let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not :
As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all Men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.*

THE Apostle in these Words recommends unto us a great and comprehensive Duty, *the doing of good*; concerning which the Text offers these *five* particulars to our Consideration.

D d

I. The

Vol. V I

I. The Nature of the Duty it self, which is called *well doing*, v. 9. and *doing good* v. 10.

II. The extent of this Duty, in respect of it's Object, which is all Mankind, *Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them, who are of the household of faith.*

III. The measure of it, *as we have opportunity.*

IV. Our unwearied perseverance in it; *let us not be weary in well doing.*

V. The Argument and Encouragement to it, because *in due season we shall reap, if we faint not: Therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good, &c.*

I. I will consider the Nature of the Duty it self; of *well doing*, and *doing good*. And this I shall explain to you as briefly as I can, by considering the extent of the Act of doing

doing Good, and the Excellency of it. And

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1. The extent of the Act. It comprehends in it all those ways wherein we may be beneficial and useful to one another. It reaches not only to the Bodies of Men, but to their Souls, that Better and more Excellent part of our selves; and is conversant in all those Ways and Kinds, whereby we may serve the temporal, or Spiritual Good of our Neighbour, and promote either his present, or his future and eternal Happiness.

To instruct the Ignorant, or reduce those that are in Error; to *turn the disobedient to the wisdom of the just*, and reclaim those that are engaged in any evil Course, by good Counsel, and seasonable Admonition, and by prudent and kind Reproof; to resolve and satisfy the doubting Mind; to confirm the weak; to heal the broken-hearted, and to comfort the melancholy and troubled Spirits. These are the

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most noblest Ways of Charity, because they are conversant about the Souls of Men, and tend to procure and promote their eternal Felicity.

And then to feed the hungry, to cloath the naked, release the imprisoned; to redeem the Captives, and to vindicate those who are injur'd and oppress'd in their Persons, or Estates, or Reputation; to repair those who are ruin'd in their Fortunes; and, in a word, to relieve and comfort those who are in any kind of Calamity or Distress.

All these are but the several Branches and Instances of this great Duty here in the Text, of *doing good*; tho' it hath, in this place, a more particular respect to the Charitable supply of those, who are in Want and Necessity; and therefore with a more particular regard to that, I shall Discourse of it at this time. You see the extent of the Duty. We will in the

2. Place,

2. Place, briefly say something of the Excellency of it, which will appear, if we consider, That it is the imitation of the highest Excellency and Perfection. To do Good, is to be like God, who *is Good, and doth good*; and it is to be like to him, in that which he esteems his greatest Glory. It is to be like the Son of God, who, when he was pleased to take our Nature upon him, and live here below, and to dwell amongst us, *went about doing good*. And it is to be like the blessed Angels, the highest Rank and Order of God's Creatures; whose great Employment it is to be *ministering Spirits, for the good of Men*. So that for a Man to be kind, and helpful, and beneficial to others, is to be a good Angel, and a Saviour, and a kind of God too.

It is an Argument of a great, and noble, and generous Mind, to extend our Thoughts and Cares to the concernments of others, and to employ our interest, and power, and

Dd 3 endeavours

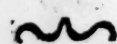
endeavours for their benefit and advantage: Whereas a low, and mean, and narrow Spirit, is contracted and shrivel'd up within it self, and cares only for its own things, without any regard to the good and happiness of others.

It is the most noble work in the World, because that inclination of Mind, which prompts us to do good, is the very temper and disposition of *Happiness*. *Solomon*, after all his Experience of worldly greatness and pleasure, at last pitched upon this, as the great felicity of humane Life, and the only good Use that is to be made of a prosperous and plentiful Fortune. *Eccles. 3. 12. I know* (says he, speaking of Riches) *that there is no good in them, but for a Man to rejoice and do good in his life.* And certainly the best way to take joy in an Estate, is to do good with it; and a greater and wiser than *Solomon* has said it, even he who is the Power and Wisdom of God has said it, that

that it is a more blessed thing to give than to receive.

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Consider farther, That this is one of the great and substantial parts of Religion, and next to the love and honour, which we pay to Almighty God, the most acceptable Service that we can do to him; it is one Table of the Law, and next the *First and great Commandment*, of *loving the Lord our God*, and very like to it. *And the second is like unto it*, (says our Saviour) *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self*; like to it, in the excellency of it; and equal to it, in the necessary obligation of it. For *this Commandment* (says St. John, 1 Epist. Chap. 4. v. 21). *we have from him, that he who loveth God, love his Brother also.* The First Commandment indeed excels in the dignity of the Object, because it enjoins the Love of God; but the second seems to have the advantage in the reality of its Effects: for the Love of God consists in our acknowledgment, and honour of him; but our *righteousness and goodness ex-*

 tends not to him; we can do him no
 Vol. VI. real Benefit and Advantage: But
 our love to Men is really Useful and
 Beneficial to them; for which rea-
 son, God is contented in many ca-
 ses, that the external Honour and
 Worship which he requires of us
 by his positive Commands, should
 give way to that Natural Duty of
 Love and Mercy which we owe
 to one another. *I will have mercy*
(says God in the Prophet Amos)
and not sacrifice.

And to shew how great a value
 God puts upon this Duty, he hath
 made it the very Testimony of our
 love to himself; and for want of it,
 hath declared that he will reject all
 our other Professions and Testimo-
 nies of love to him, as false and
 insincere. *Who so hath this worlds*
good, (saith St. John, 1 Epist. 3. 17.)
and seeth his Brother have need, and
shutteth up his bowels of compassion from
him, how dwelleth the love of God in
him? And again, Chap. 4. ver. 20.
If any man say, I love God, and ha-
teth his Brother, he is a lyar; for he
that

To whom we are to do good.

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that loveth not his Brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen? Vol. VI

You see the Duty here recommended, both in the Extent and in the Excellency of it; *let us do good.* I proceed to consider, in the

II. Place, the Extent of this Duty, in respect of its Object, which is all Mankind, but more especially Christians, those that are of the same Faith and Religion. *Let us do good unto all men, especially unto those that are of the household of Faith.* So that the Object, about which this Duty is conversant, is very large, and takes in all Mankind; *let us do good unto all men.* The Jews confined their Love and Kindness to their own Kindred and Nation; and because they were prohibited familiarity with Idolatrous Nations, and were enjoined to maintain a perpetual Enmity with *Amalek*, and the seven Nations of *Canaan*, whom God had cast out before them, and devoted to Ruin; they looked up-

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on themselves as perfectly discharg'd from all Obligation of Kindness to the rest of Mankind: And yet it is certain, that they were expressly enjoin'd by their Law, to be kind to Strangers, because they themselves had been Strangers in the Land of *Egypt*. But our Saviour hath restored this Law of Love and Charity to its Natural and Original extent; and hath declared every one that is of the same nature with our selves to be our *Neighbour*, and our *Brother*; and that he is to be treated by us accordingly, when ever he stands in need of our kindness and help; and to shew that none are out of the compass of our Charity, he hath expressly commanded us to extend it to those, who of all others can least pretend to it, even our *Enemies* and *Persecutors*.

So that if the Question be about the extent of our Charity in general, these *two* things are plainly enjoined by the Christian Religion.

I. Ne-

1. Negatively, That we should not hate or bear ill-will to any man, or do him any harm or mischief. *Love worketh no Evil to his Neighbour*, (saith the Apostle) *Rom. 13. 10.* And this negative Charity every Man may exercise towards all Men, without Exception, and that equally; because it does not signify any positive Act, but only that we abstain from Enmity and Hatred, from Injury and Revenge, which it is in every Man's power, by the Grace of God, and the due care and government of himself, to do.

2. Positively, The Law of Charity requires, that we should bear an universal good-will to all Men, and wish every Man's happiness, and pray for it, as sincerely as we wish and pray for our own; and if we be sincere in our Wishes, and Prayers for the good of others, we shall be so in our Endeavours to procure and promote it.

But

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But the great difficulty is, as to the exercise of our Charity, and the real Expressions and Effects of it, in doing good to others; which is the Duty here meant in the Text, and (as I told you before) does more particularly relate to the Relief of those who are in Want and Necessity. And the reason of the difficulty is, because no Man can do good to all in this kind, if he would; it not being possible for any Man to come to the knowledge of every man's Necessity and Distress; and if he could, no man's Ability can possibly reach to the supply and the relief of all men's Wants. And indeed this limitation the Text gives to this Duty; *as we have opportunity* (says the Apostle) *let us do good unto all men*; which either signifies, as occasion is offered, or as we have Ability of doing, or both; as I shall shew afterwards.

So that it being impossible to exercise this Charity to all Men that stand in need of it, 'tis necessary
to

to make a difference, and to use Prudence and Discretion in the Choice of the most fit and proper Objects. We do not know the Wants of all men, and therefore the bounds of our Knowledge do of necessity limit our Charity within a certain compass; and of those whom we do know, we can relieve but a small part, for want of Ability; from whence it follows, that tho' a man were never so Charitably disposed, yet he must of necessity set some Rules to himself, for the management of his Charity to the best advantage. What those Rules are, cannot minutely and nicely be determined; when all is done, much must be left to every man's prudence and discretion, upon a full view and consideration of the Case before him, and all the Circumstances of it; but yet such general Rules may be given, as may serve for the direction of our Practice in most Cases; and for the rest, every man's prudence, as well as it can, must determine the matter. And the Rules which I shall give, shall be these.

First,

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First, Cases of Extremity ought to take the first place, and do for that time challenge precedence of all other Considerations. If a Person be in great and present Distress, and his Necessity so urgent, that if he be not immediately relieved, he must perish; this is so violent a Case, and calls so loud for present help, that there is no resisting of it, whatever the Person be; though a perfect Stranger to us, though most unworthy, though the greatest Enemy we have in the World, yet the greatness of his Distress does so strongly plead for him, as to silence all Considerations to the contrary; for after all, he is *a man*, and is of the same Nature with our selves, and the consideration of *Humanity* ought, for that time, to prevail over all Objections against the Man, and to prefer him to our Charity, before the nearest Relation and Friend, who is not in the like Extremity. In other cases, we not only may, but ought to relieve

relieve our Friends, and those that have deserved well of us in the first place: but if our Enemy be in Extremity, then that Divine Precept takes place, *if thine Enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him to drink.*

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Secondly, In the next place, I think, that the Obligation of Nature, and the nearness of Relation, does challenge a Preference; for there is all the Reason in the World, if other things be equal, that we should consider and supply the necessity of those, who are of our Blood and Kindred, and Members of our Family, before the Necessities of Strangers, and those who have no relation to us. There is a special Duty incumbent upon us, and another Obligation beside that of Charity, to have a particular Care and Regard for them. In this case not only Christianity, but Nature ties this Duty upon us, *1 Tim. 5. 8. If any man provide not for his own, especially for his Domesticks, for them that*

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that are of his Family, *he hath denyed the Faith, and is worse than an Infidel*; that is, he doth not only offend against the Law of Christianity, but against the very Dictates of Nature, which prevail even amongst the Infidels. And our Saviour hath told us, that when our Parents stand in need of relief, it is more acceptable to God, to employ our Estates that way, than to devote them to him, and his immediate service; and that it is a kind of *Sacrilege* to Consecrate that to God, whereby our Parents may be profited, and provided for in their Necessity.

Thirdly, The Obligation of Kindness and Benefits, lays the next claim to our Charity. If they fall into Want, who have obliged us by their former Kindness and Charity, both Justice and Charity do challenge from us a particular consideration of their Case; and proportionably, if we our selves have been obliged to their Family, or to any that are nearly related to them.

Fourthly,

Fourthly, Those who are of the household of faith, and of the same Religion; and Members of the same Mystical Body, and do partake of the same Holy Mysteries, the Body and Blood of our Blessed Saviour, the strictest Bond of Love and Charity, These fall under a very particular Consideration in the exercise of our Charity. And of this the Apostle puts us in Mind, in the last words of my Text; let us do good unto all Men, especially unto those that are of the household of faith. God hath a special Love and Regard for such; and those whom God Loves, ought to be very dear to us.

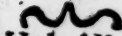
And this, perhaps, was a consideration of the first rank in those times, when Christians liv'd among Heathens, and were exposed to continual Wants and Sufferings; but it signifies much less now, that Christianity is the general Profession of a Nation, and is too often made use of to very uncharitable purposes;

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poses; to confine Men's Bounty and Benefits to their own Sect and Party, as if they, and none but they, were *the household of Faith*; A Principle, which I know not whether it hath more of *Judaisme* or of *Popery* in it.

Fifthly, After these, the Merit of the Persons, who are the Objects of our Charity, and all the Circumstances belonging to them, are to be valu'd and consider'd, and we are accordingly to proportion our Charity, and the degrees of it. I shall instance in some particulars, by which a prudent Man may judge of the rest.

Those who labour in an honest calling, but yet are oppress'd with their charge, or disabled for a time by Sickneſs, or some other casualty; these many a time need as much, and certainly deserve much better than common Beggars; for these are useful members of the Common-Wealth; and we cannot place

place our Charity better, than upon those, who do what they can to support themselves.  Vol. VI.

Those likewise who are fallen from a rich and plentiful Condition, without any fault or Prodigality of their own, meerly by the Providence of God, or some general Calamity; these are more especially Objects of our Charity, and liberal Relief.

And those also, who have been Charitable, and have liberally relieved others, when they were in Condition to do it; or the Children, or near Relations of those, who were eminently Charitable and beneficial to Mankind, do deserve a particular regard in our Charity. Mankind being (as I may say) bound in Justice, and for the honour of God's Providence, to make good his Promise, to preserve such from extremi necessity.

And *lastly*, those, whose visible Wants, and great Age and Infirmities

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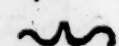
mities do plead for more than ordinary Pity, and do, at first sight, convince every one that sees them, that they do not Beg out of Laziness, but of necessity, and because they are not able to do any thing towards their own support and subsistence.

There are innumerable Circumstances more, which it would be endless to reckon up; but these which I have mentioned are some of the chief, and by proportion to these, we may direct our selves in other Cases.

Sixthly, Those whom we certainly know to be true Objects of Charity, are to be consider'd by us, before those who are strangers to us, and whose Condition we do not know; yea, tho' in common Charity we do not dis-believe them; because in Reason and Prudence we are obliged to prefer those, who are certainly known to us, since we find by experience, that there are many Cheats and counterfeit Beggars, who can tell a fair Story, and carry about

about Testimonials of their own making; and likewise because we run the Hazard of misplacing our Charity, when there are Objects enough besides, where we are sure we shall place it right; and Charity misplaced, as it is in Truth and Reality no Charity in it's self, so it is hardly any in us, when we squander it so imprudently as to pass by a certain and real Object, and give it to those of whom we are not certain, that they are true Objects of Charity. In this blind way a Man *may give all his Goods to the Poor*, as he thinks, and yet do no real Charity. And therefore, unless we be able to relieve *every one that asks*, we must of necessity make a difference, and use our best Prudence in the choice of the most proper Objects of our Charity.

And yet we ought not to observe this Rule so strictly, as to shut out all whom we do not know, without exception; because their Case, if it be true, may sometimes be much more pitiable; and of greater extremity, than the case of many

Vol. VI.  whom we do know ; and then it would be uncharitable to reject such, and to harden our Hearts so far against them, as utterly to disbelieve them ; because it is no fault of theirs, that we do not know them ; no, their Wants may be real, notwithstanding that ; especially when their Extremity seems great, we ought not to stand upon too rigorous a Proof and Evidence of it, but should accept of a fair probability.

Seventhly, Those who suffer for the Cause of Religion, and are stript of all for the sake of it, ought to have a great Precedence in our Charity to most other cases. And this of late hath been, and still is, the case of many among us, who have fled hither for Refuge, from the Tyranny and Cruelty of their Persecutors, and have been by a most extraordinary Charity of the whole Nation, more than once extended to them, most seasonably reliev'd ; but especially by the Bounty of this great City, whose Libe.

Vol. VI. *ders, as we have Opportunity ; others, as we have Ability: So that this Expression may refer, either to the Occasions of our Charity, or to the Season of it, or to the Proportion and Degree of it.*

1. It may refer to the Occasions of our Charity, *as we have Opportunity let us do good*, that is, according as the Occasions of doing good shall present themselves to us, so often as an Opportunity is offer'd. And this is an Argument of a very good and charitable Disposition, gladly to lay hold of the occasions of doing good ; as it were to meet Opportunities when they are a coming towards us. This forwardness of Mind, in the work of Charity, the Apostle commends in the *Corinthians*, 2 Cor. 9. 2. *I know the forwardness of your minds, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia: And this he requires of all Christians, Tit. 3. 10. That they should be ready to every good work ; And 1 Tim. 6. 18. That we be ready to distribute, willing*

ling to communicate. Some are very ready to decline these Opportunities, and to get out of the way of them; and when they thrust themselves upon them, and they cannot avoid them, they do what they do *grudgingly*, and not with a willing mind.

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2. It may refer to the Season of this Duty, *ὡς καὶ ἔχουσιν*, while we have time, *ὡς* for *ἕως*, whilst this Life lasts; so Grotius does understand, and interpret this Phrase; and then the Apostle does hereby intimate to them, the uncertainty of their Lives, especially in those times of Persecution. And this Consideration holds in all times in some degree, that our Lives are short and uncertain, that it is but a little while that we can serve God in this kind, namely, while we are in this World, in this Vale of Misery and Wants. In the next World there will be no occasion, no Opportunity for it; we shall then have nothing to do, but to reap the Reward of the

Vol. VI. the good we have done in this Life, and to receive that blessed Sentence from the Mouth of the great Judge of the World, *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat, &c. And Euge bone serve! Well done good and faithfull Servant! thou hast been faithfull in a little, and I will make thee Ruler over much.* God will then declare his Bounty and Goodness to us, and open those inexhaustible Treasures of Glory and Happiness, which all good Men shall partake of, in proportion to the good which they have done in this World. Or else,

3. (Which I take to be the most probable meaning of this Phrase) It may refer to the Degree of this Duty in proportion to our Ability and Estate; as we have Ability, *let us do good unto all Men.* And this the Phrase will bear, as Learned Men have observ'd; and it is very reasonable to take in this Sense,

Sense, at least, as part of the meaning of it, either exprest or imply'd. For without this we cannot exercise Charity, tho' there were never so many Occasions for it; and then this Precept will be of the same Importance with that of the Son of Sirach, *Ecclus. 35. 10. Give unto the most high according as he hath enriched thee*; and with that Counsel, *Tob. 4. 7. Give Alms, ἐκ τῶν ὑπερχόωντων, according to thy Substance*, and *8. v. If thou hast abundance, give Alms accordingly*. And this may be reasonably expected from us; for where-ever his Providence gives a Man an Estate, it is but in Trust for certain Uses and Purposes, among which Charity and Alms is the chief: And we must be accountable to him, whether we have disposed it faithfully to the Ends, for which it was committed to us. It is an easie thing with him to level Mens Estates, and to give every Man a Competency; but he does on purpose suffer things to be distributed so unequally, to try and exercise


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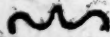
exercise the Virtues of Men in several ways ; the Faith and Patience of the Poor, the Contentedness of those in a middle Condition, the Charity and Bounty of the Rich. And in truth, Wealth and Riches, that is, an Estate above what sufficeth our real Occasions and Necessities, is in no other sense a *Blessing*, than as it is an Opportunity put into our Hands, by the Providence of God, of doing more good ; and if we do not faithfully employ it to this end, it is but a Temptation and a Snare ; and *the rust of our Silver and our Gold will be a witness against us ; and we do but heap up Treasures together against the last Day.*

But what Proportion our Charity ought to bear to our Estates, I shall not undertake to determine. The Circumstances of Men have too much variety in them to admit of any certain Rule ; some may do well, and others may do better ; every Man, as God hath put

put into his Heart, and according to his Belief of *the recompence which shall be made at the resurrection of the just.* I shall only say in general, that if there be first a free and willing Mind, that will make a Man charitable to his Power; For the liberal Man will devise liberal things. And we cannot propose a better Pattern to our selves in this kind, than the King and Queen, who are, as they ought to be (but as it very seldom happens) the most bright and shining Examples of this greatest of all Graces and Virtues, Charity and Compassion to the poor and persecuted. I proceed to the

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IV. Thing considerable in the Text, viz. Our unwearied Perseverance in this work of doing good, *let us not be weary in well-doing.* After we have done some few Acts of Charity, yea tho' they should be very considerable, we must not sit down and say we have done enough. There will still be new Objects, new Occasions,
new

 new Opportunities for the exercise
 Vol. VI. of our Charity, springing up and
 presenting themselves to us. Let
 us never think, that we can do
 enough in the way of doing good.
 The best and the happiest Beings
 are most constant and unwearied in
 this work of doing good. The
 holy Angels of God are conti-
 nually employed in *ministering* for
 the good of those, who shall
 be Heirs of Salvation: And the
 Son of God, when he appear'd in
 our Nature, and *dwelt among us*,
 that he might be a perfect and fa-
 miliar Example to us of all Ho-
 linefs and Virtue, *he went about do-*
ing good to the Bodies and to the
 Souls of Men. How diligent and
 unwearied was he in this work! It
 was his Employment and his Plea-
 sure, his *Meat and Drink*, the
 Joy and the Life of his Life. And
 God himself, tho' he is infinitely
 and perfectly good in himself, yet
 he still continues *to do good*, and
 is never weary of this blessed work.
 It is the Nature, and the Perfecti-
 on, and the Felicity of God him-
 self,

self; and how can we be weary of that work, which is an Imitation of the highest Excellency and Perfection, and the very Essence of Happiness.

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V. And lastly, Here is the Argument and Encouragement to the chearful discharge of this Duty, *because in due season we shall reap, if we faint not; therefore as we have opportunity, let us do good unto all Men. In due season we shall reap*, that is, sooner or later, in this World, or in the other, we shall receive the full reward of our well-doing.

And now I have explain'd this Duty to you, as plainly and briefly as I could, the hardest part of my Task is yet behind, to perswade Men to the practice of it; and to this purpose I shall only insist upon the promise in the Text, *be not weary in well-doing; for in due season ye shall reap, if ye faint not.* We shall reap the pleasure and satisfaction of it in our own Minds, and all the other mighty Advantages of it in this World, and the

Vol. VI. the vast and unspeakable Reward of it in the other.

First, We shall reap the Pleasure and Satisfaction of it in our own Minds; and there is no sensual Pleasure that is comparable to the delight of Doing good. This *Cato* makes his boast of, as the great Comfort and Joy of his old Age, *Conscientia bene acta vitæ, multorumque benefactorum recordatio jucundissima*. The remembrance of a well spent Life, and of many Benefits and Kindnesses done by us to others, is one of the most pleasant things in the World. Sensual Pleasures soon die and vanish; but that is not the worst of them, they leave a Sting behind them, and when the Pleasure is gone, nothing remains but Guilt, and Trouble, and Repentance: whereas the Reflection upon any good we have done, is a perpetual Spring of Peace and Pleasure to us, and no Trouble and Bitterness ensues upon it; the Thoughts of it lye even and easy in our Minds, and
so

so often as it comes to our Remembrance, it ministers fresh Comfort to us. Vol. VI.

Secondly, We shall likewise reap other mighty Advantages by it in this World. It is the way to derive a lasting Blessing upon our Estates. What we give in Alms and Charity is consecrated to God, and is one of the chiefest and most acceptable Sacrifices in the Christian Religion; so the Apostle tells us, *Heb. 13. 16. To do good, and to communicate, forget not; for with such Sacrifices God is well pleased.* It is like the first-Fruits under the Law, which being dedicated and offered up to God, did derive a Blessing upon their whole Harvest.

And it procures for us also the Blessings and Prayers of those, to whom we extend our Charity; their Blessing, I say, upon us and ours, and all that we have; and *is it a small thing in our eye, to*
F f have


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have (as Job speaks) the Blessing of them, who are ready to perish, to come upon us? The fervent Prayers of the poor for us availeth much, for God hath a special regard to the Prayers of the destitute, and his Ear is open to their cry.

Few Men have Faith to believe it, but certainly Charity is a great security to us in the times of Evil, and that not only from the special Promise and Providence of God, which is engaged to preserve those from want, who are ready to relieve the Necessity of others, Prov. 11. 25. *The liberal Soul shall be made fat; and he that watereth shall be watered also himself;* and Prov. 28. 27. *He that giveth to the poor shall not lack; he shall not be afraid in the evil time, and in the days of Dearth he shall be satisfied,* says the Psalmist: But besides the Promise and Providence of God, our Charity and Alms are likewise a great security to us, from the Nature and Reason of the

the thing it self. Whosoever is charitable to others, does wisely bespeak the Charity and Kindness of others for himself, against the day of necessity; for there is nothing that makes a Man more, and surer Friends, than our Bounty; this will plead for us, and stand our Friend in our greatest Troubles and Dangers; For a good Man, saith the Apostle, that is, for one that is ready to oblige others by great Kindnesses and Benefits, one would even dare to die. It has sometimes happened, that the Obligation which a man hath laid upon others by a chearful and seasonable Charity, hath in time of Danger and Extremity done him more kindness, than all his Estate could do for him. *Alas*, saith the Wise Man, *hath delivered from Death.*

And in times of publick Distress, and when we are beset with cruel and powerful Enemies, who, if God were not on our side, would swallow us

Vol. VI.  up quick, the publick Charity of a Nation does many times prove its best Safeguard and Shield. There is a most remarkable Passage to this purpose, Eccles. 29. 11, 12, 13. Lay up thy Treasure according to the commandment of the most high, and it shall bring thee more profit, than Gold; shut up thine alms in thy Store-house, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction, it shall fight for thee against thy enemies, more than a mighty Shield and a strong Spear.

And of this I doubt not, but we of this Nation, by the great Mercy and Goodness of Almighty God, have had happy experience in our late wonderful Deliverance, under the Conduct and Valour, of one of the best and bravest of Princes, and to whom by too many among us, the most unworthy and unthankful Returns have been made, for the unwearyed pains he hath undergone, and for the desperate hazards he hath expos'd himself to for our sakes, that

that ever were made to so Great and Generous a Benefactor; so great a Benefactor I say, not only to these Nations, but to all Europe, in asserting and vindicating their Liberties against the insolent Tyranny and Pride of one of the greatest oppressours of Mankind, of whom I may say, as Job does of the Leviathan, *Job 41. 33, 34. Upon the earth is not his like, he beholdeth all high things, and is the King of all the Children of Pride.*

And beyond all this, the Blessing of God does descend upon the posterity of those, who are eminently Charitable, and great Benefactors to Mankind. This David observes in his time; *I have been young (says he) and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging Bread; and what he means by the righteous Man, he explains in the next Words, he is ever merciful and lendeth.*

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I shall only add upon this Head, that the practice of this Virtue will be one of our best comforts at the hour of Death, and that we shall then look back upon all the good we have done in our life, with the greatest contentment and joy imaginable. Xenophon in his *Cyrus*, which he design'd for the perfect Idea of a good Prince, represents him in the last minutes of his life, addressing himself to God to this purpose, *Thou knowest that I have been a lover of Mankind; and now that I am leaving this World, I hope to find that mercy from thee, which I have shewed to others.* These Words that excellent heathen Historian thought fit to come from the mouth of so excellent a Prince, as he had describ'd him, just as he was leaving the World; by which we may see, what the Light of Nature thought to be the best comfort of a dying Man. This brings me to the

Third

Third, and last particular which I mentioned, the vast and unspeakable Reward, which this grace and virtue of Charity will meet with in the other World. It will plead for us at the Day of Judgment, and procure for us a most glorious recompence at the resurrection of the *Just*, and that proportionable to the degrees of our Charity; *2 Cor. 9. 6. He which soweth sparingly, shall reap sparingly: and he which soweth bountifully, shall reap bountifully;* and from this Consideration, the Apostle encourageth our Perseverance in Well-doing, *let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not;* that is, we shall certainly meet with the reward of it, if not in this World, yet in the other.

And now that I have declar'd this Duty to you, together with the mighty pleasure, and advantages, and rewards of it, I crave leave to present you with some

Vol. VI. of the best Occasions, and Opportunities of the exercise and practice of it. And for your encouragement hereto, I shall read to you, the present State of the chief Hospitals belonging to this great City, and of the disposal of their Charity for the last Year.

And now I have laid before you these great Objects of your Charity, and the best Arguments I could think of to incline and stir up your Minds to the exercise of this excellent Grace and Virtue; as there is no time left for it, I having, I am afraid already tir'd your Patience, so I hope there is no need to press this Duty any farther upon you, since you are so willing and forward of your selves, and so very ready to every good Work. This great City hath a double Honour due to it, of being both the greatest Benefactors in this kind, and the most faithful Managers, and Disposers of it; and I am now in a place most proper for the
mention

mention of *Christ's Hospital*, a Protestant Foundation of that most Pious and Excellent Prince *Edward*, VI. Which I believe is one of the best instances of so large and so well manag'd Charity, this Day in the World.

And now to Conclude all, if any of you know any better employment, than *to do good*; any work that will give truer Pleasure to our Minds; that hath greater and better promises made to it, the *Promises of the life that now is, and that which is to come*; that we shall reflect upon with more comfort, when we come to dye; and that through the mercies and merits of our Blessed Saviour, will stand us in more stead at the Day of Judgment; let us mind that work: but if we do not; let us apply our selves to this business of Charity, with all our might, and *let us not be weary in well-doing, because in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

Now


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Now the God of Peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, the great Shepherd of the Sheep, through the blood of the everlasting Covenant, make you perfect in every good work, to do his will through Jesus Christ, to whom with thee, O Father, and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, thanksgiving and praise, both now and for ever, Amen.



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